REINTERPRETING WELSHNESS: SONGS AND CHORAL MEMBERSHIP IN CULTURAL IDENTITY

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A dissertation submitted to Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May, 2012
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following choral directors for their time and help with this dissertation: George Jones, Cefin and Rhian Roberts, Tim Rhys-Evans, James Cassarino, and Mari Morgan. A special thanks to Trystan Lewis, not only for his insights on Welsh choral singing, but also for graciously allowing me to attend a year’s worth of rehearsals for both of his choirs.

Thank you also to the following people for help with my research after I returned home: Aja Ewing, Shaun Alphonso, Brian and Sue Evans with the International Eisteddfod, Gareth Oliver of Cantorion Colin Jones, Gareth Hicks, Jeanne Jindra Jones, Joel Ware IV, WNAA President Stacy Evans and members of the organization, Nelson Llewllyn, and Anne Habermehl. A special thanks to Holly Kollar, for helping me make sense of the television lingo.

Diolch yn fawr iawn to the following choirs and individuals for their participation in this dissertation—thank you also to all of those who participated anonymously, or who I may have forgotten:

Côr Meibion Llanrwst Ar Cylch (Llanrwst and District Male Voice Choir), Llanrwst
Côr Meibion y Penrhyn (Penrhyn Male Voice Choir), Bethesda
Côr Meibion Maelgwn (Maelgwn Male Voice Choir), Deganwy/Llandudno Junction
Côr Meibion y Foel (Foel Male Voice Choir), Llanerchymedd, Anglesey
Côr Meibion Dinbych A’r Cylch (Denbigh and District Male Voice Choir), Denbigh
Côr Merched Bro Nest (Bro Nest Ladies Choir), Teifi Valley
Côr Ieuentid Môn (Anglesey Youth Choir), Llangefni, Anglesey
Côr Cymysg Dyffryn Conwy (Conwy Valley Mixed Choir), Conwy
Côr Glanaethwy (Glanaethwy Choir), Bangor

Only Men Aloud, Cardiff
Côr Cymru Goledd America (The North American Welsh Choir)

Toronto Male Voice Choir, Ontario
Gwenda Jones  T.A.P. Davies  Rev. Deian Evans
Sylvia Plant  Bryn Hughes  Cathleen Morris
Doris Bland  Meinir Wyn Roberts  Anne Habermehl
Rosina Jones  Gruffydd Owen  Loris Thomas
Pat Hargreaves  Rheinallt Wyn Davies  Joyce McCullough
John Kennerley  Ceurwyn Anthony  Robert Hughes
Jon Richmond  Humphreys  Mary Triola
Glyn Robert  Lowri Elenid Davies  Nice Lady Nancy and
George Jones  Arvona Haycock  Family
H.E. Lewis  Eleri Roberts
Gwyneth Ann  Sue Richardson
McDonald  Lynda Mula
Owen Owens  Ruth Davies
Geraint Evans  Alaw Davies
Bleddyn Williams  Eirian Davies
R.H. Jones  Carys Vaughan Rees
Wil Parry  Margaret Daniel
Hywel Owen  Alison Burford
Victor Burton Parry  Kim Rowlands
Idwal L. Jones  Lisa Jén Jones
John Outram  Nicole Clamp
Emyr Vaughan Evans  Bethan Mai Parry
Gareth David Jones  Sian Catrin Jones
Kenneth Jones  Rhys Owain Ruggiero
Jesse Bellis  Ceri Elsbeth Lewis
Gerallt Price-Roberts  Arianwen Mererid
Bill Chapman  James
David Hands  Miriam Elin
R.W. Owen  Roberta Ingman
Ifan Hughes, M.B.E.  Roberts
T.J. Edwards  Robert E. Davies and
Robin Roberts  Family
David M. Parry  Torry Watkins
J.R. Jones  Beth Landmesser
Willie Lewis Roberts  Shaun Alphonso
Bob Williams  Patrick Bowman
John Hughes  R. Stephen Jones
David Bryn Jones  Aja Lynn Ewing
E.M. Evans  Greg Brown
Geraint S. Roberts  Don Galloway
Ken Armstrong  Bill Watson
Phil Taylor  Fred MacKenzie
Keith Jones  Dewi Jones
Glyn Edwards  Ed Golem
Clwyd Wynne  John Mitchell
Alwyn Jones  D. Ray Freebury
I would especially like to thank Hugh and Betty Roberts, Colin and Julie Godley, and Paul and Cathy Eales for their hospitality and love; they were our families in Wales. A special thanks also to the Bangor Rotary Club for their support and generosity.

Thank you to the fine scholars on my committee, who took time from their busy schedules to read and carefully edit my wordy chapters—Denise Seachrist, Richard Feinberg, Tom Janson, and my advisor Kazadi wa Mukuna are all inspirations to me. Thank you to Dr. Terry E. Miller for his instrumental role in my ethnomusicological training. Thanks also to Dr. Ted Albrecht for turning me on to the work of Linda Pohly. Thanks to Linda Iceman for holding everything together. A special thanks to Denise Seachrist, Bob Sines, Robin Kuzenko, and Doug Byerly: it is not often that one writes a massive dissertation while gainfully employed in a much-loved job, and I have them to thank for this.

Thank you to my friends—including my awesome co-workers—and my students for constant encouragement. Thank you to AACC’s Dissertation Support Group, who gave me the push I needed to start typing. A special thanks to my friend Chalet Seidel for being there for me every step of the way. Thanks also to Anna Marie Trester for inspiration and confidence. To my fellow researcher-friends in the UK, Caroline Lucas and Jenny Daniels—they probably do not realize how much their own work, and their support of mine, helped me move forward with this project. A special thank you also to my siblings: Tracy, whose sweetness and respect endlessly encouraged me, and David, whose own speedy dissertation and constant “when are you going to finish?!” helped egg me on. Thanks to my Gram for making an effort to understand what I do, and for encouraging me “to finish that goddamn paper” so she could see me graduate.

Finally, thank you to my parents. I could not have done this without their support in everything I do.

I saved the impossible thank you for the end. I am lucky enough to spend every day with the greatest person I have ever met. My sweet, brilliant love made it possible for me to go to Wales, spent years talking about this project and traveling to choral events with me, helped me incorporate quantitative research, had endless discussions with me about how cultural identity and musical meaning might be created in the brain, and carefully edited nearly every section of this dissertation. This is for you, Phillip.

“My sweet, sweet, sweet someone, coming through that door…the band is playin, I feel like stayin, honey could we ask for more?”
…a quality which music sometimes has, being the art which is most nigh to tears and memory…

Oscar Wilde, *The Burden of Itys*

I started singing because I come from Wales.

Bryn Terfel, *BBC Wales-Music*

Marco Polo describes a bridge, stone by stone. “But which is the stone that supports the bridge?” Kublai Khan asks. “The bridge is not supported by one stone or another,” Marco answers, “but by the line of the arch that they form.” Kublai Khan remains silent, reflecting. Then he adds: “Why do you speak to me of the stones? It is only the arch that matters to me.” Polo answers: “Without stones there is no arch.”

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Signs in Cultural Identity

Identity studies abound in ethnomusicology (see Richard Jones-Bamman 2006, Patria Román-Velázquez 2006, Jane C. Sugarman 1999, Christopher A. Waterman 1990). Identity involves the use of markers to delineate boundaries between oneself and others. This process is both inclusive and exclusive simultaneously: one perceives group membership among others who share similar markers, and one perceives him/herself as distinctly different from those outside of the boundaries. It is well known that music and musical practices can be used as such markers, and also that identity created largely on nonmusical markers can create an affinity towards certain musics and musical practices. An emphasis on the individual, fluid, and contextual nature of such identity-creation underlies this research.

Cultural identity is the term used in this dissertation to describe perceived group membership in which a set of individuals share any number of cultural signs, including—but not limited to—birthplace/geographic origins, similar personal experiences, and language. One central argument is that these markers are highly individual. In other words, someone who sees him/herself as part of a group can quite easily choose different signs of membership than someone else within the invisible group

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1 A brief review of recent literature on music and identity—including Timothy Rice’s criticisms of these studies (2010)—appears at the beginning of the following chapter, along with a review of relevant Welsh music research.

2 I am using the following basic definition of a sign, as synonymous with “marker,” after Charles Peirce: it includes a vehicle for meaning, what meaning/information is assigned to or accessed by that vehicle, and this process in the mind. See Justus Buchler, ed., Philosophical Writings of Peirce (New York: Dover, 1955).
boundaries. For example, it has been argued that language is a necessary sign of cultural
identity (see Victor Horboken 2004: 205, Meic Llwellyn 2000: 337). This research
shows that language is merely a salient, obvious, and easy sign, and thus it is often used
as such. However, given the individual nature of these processes, language may not be a
particularly meaningful sign to some. It is often accompanied by and/or bound up with
other signs, and it may be absent altogether. This is demonstrated in research that shows
Welsh-speaking singers in Wales choosing songs with English-language lyrics as signs of
their Welsh identity, and even more poignantly in North America among those with
Welsh ancestry, where language-use is minimal or absent and other signs of Welsh
identity—ancestry, musical experiences, and even enthusiasm—are emphasized instead.

The issue of language is a particularly important one for Wales, which witnessed
the near-elimination of the Welsh language—and the subsequent fight for its survival—in
the twentieth century (see Geraint H. Jenkins and Mari A. Williams, ed. 2000 for a
comprehensive overview). This language struggle, along with gender, age, and location,
are all factors that affect Welsh cultural identity and will be addressed in this dissertation.
Music—in particular, choral music and choral membership—will provide the basis by
which these topics are explored.

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I use the terms “sex” and “gender” by their standard usages—“sex” for differentiating “male” and
“female” singers, and “gender” to emphasize socially-constructed roles, behaviors, and expectations
concerning the sexes.
Theoretical Paradigm

Reinterpretation and Cultural Identity

The present research draws loosely on Melville Herskovits’ theory of reinterpretation (1948: 1, 7). He uses this term for descriptions of Africanisms among cultures in the Americas, describing it as a mechanism by which retentions manifest themselves in new forms. In other words, while some cultural elements can be traced to an older culture, they are not just “handed down.” Instead, these elements are given new forms, functions, and/or meanings to make them relevant to current psychological and social contexts.\(^4\) Herskovits aspires: “to reveal…the reinterpretation of retained cultural elements and their reworking [my emphasis] to bring them into the framework of the cultural orientations of the present day” (1951: 125). Revealing reinterpreted cultural elements is also one of the goals of this dissertation.\(^5\)

Herskovits recognized a crucial quality of cultural signs: they undergo subsequent revamping, or what he described as “reinterpretation” and “reworking,” to remain useful and meaningful. He showed how the concept of cultural elements “surviving” or being “retained” is actually a complex process of change and the reassignment of functions and meanings. Of course, reinterpretation is not unique to migrant cultural signs: even within one location, reinterpretation occurs among different people and quite often in subsequent

\(^4\) For example, an element may be given a new function and context, and thus it retains meaningfulness and usefulness to current individuals. Take the instrument berimbau in Brazil as an example. Capoeira, the Brazilian dance/martial art, provided a new context and function for this instrument, which explains why, unlike other African instruments, the berimbau survived in Brazil past the eighteenth century. Kazadi wa Mukuna, class lecture, Spring 2006, Seminar: Issues and Trends in Ethnomusicology 72691, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio.

generations.

Many social scientists have recognized that culture is not simply handed to the next generation. For example, Jocelyn Linnekin recognizes that tradition is always constructed in the present (1983: 241). Eric Hobsbawm uses the term “invented tradition” for traditions “invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and datable period…” (1983: 1). In other words, these are things created as seemingly invariant entities based on a real or feigned historical past. Many Welsh cultural elements, including the *eisteddfod*, harp traditions, and women’s traditional dress have been discussed in a similar manner; see Joan Rimmer 1986, Carol Trosset 1993, Juliette Wood 1997, and Roslyn Blyn-Ladrew 1998 for just a few of numerous examples. However, whether or not cultural elements exhibit historical continuity does not make them any less valid as signs of identity. How signs have changed is discussed in this dissertation, but it is meaning given to the signs—regardless of the amount or degree of change—that is the focus here.

Meaning must always be assigned to cultural elements, and a sign will be used only when it serves some purpose. Thus, although it may appear—to both those inside and outside the group in question—that cultural elements are “retained,” they are, to varying degrees, taken and reshaped, remolded, and thus *reinterpreted*. This includes

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7 He differentiates these from “customs,” or things established through practice. Yet of custom he writes: “it does not preclude innovation and change up to a point, though evidently the requirement that it must appear compatible or even identical with precedent imposes substantial limitations on it.” He also notes that custom “cannot afford to be invariant, because even in ‘traditional’ societies life is not so.” (1983: 2). Because both “invented traditions” and “custom” are changing and changeable behaviors, such a distinction is unnecessary for the present discussion. Moreover, the emphasis in this work is on meaning, so reinterpretation is used in a broad sense to cover the nature of any and all cultural signs.

8 An *eisteddfod* (pl. *eisteddfodau*) is a Welsh festival of competitive poetry and music. See the subsequent chapters for more detailed descriptions of these events.
being given new forms, meanings, and/or functions. Sometimes, they even are discarded. This may mean that some elements disappear altogether, and at times may “re-surface” in later generations. This dissertation is based on the argument that reinterpretation is inevitable for any and all cultural signs.

**Semiotics**

The theoretical approach in this dissertation involves semiotics—another topic not new in ethnomusicology. However, unlike previous studies in which distinct patterns and/or units of music are analyzed as signs (see Raymond Monelle 1992 for an overview), the focus here is on interpretations, meanings, and non-musical phenomena—including context—among people who perform and ascribe value to particular musical practices. “Sign” is used throughout this dissertation following Charles Peirce’s concise explanation of something that stands for something else to someone in some way (see Buchler 1955: 99). By this definition, signs are clearly not limited to language. In fact, a sign can be anything from a song to an artificial tan, ideas lucidly explained by music scholar Thomas Turino (1999) and sociologist Philip Vannini (2007), respectively. Both of these authors’ models will be used in this dissertation.

Vannini’s emphasis on taking inventory of signs and discussing how they are used in specific historical, cultural, and institutional contexts is a framework also used in this dissertation. Furthermore, his suggestion that this framework “…in particular refers to any representation of how people experience, use, practice, talk about, contest, critique, understand—and in general, interact—with polysemic meanings of semiotic resources” (2007: 125) is in line with what I hope to achieve. Put simply, this work demonstrates
how people use, discuss, and understand things that have meaning for them; the particular “things” I am focusing on include Welsh ancestry, music, and choral membership.

While I do also use Vannini’s framework, I do not agree with Vannini’s claim that the model he is putting forth is one that is largely without precedent (2007: 114). Many ethnomusicologists have employed the framework he suggests, which he sums up as: “a form of reflexive, critical, analytical, interpretive, and constructionist ethnography that focuses on the study of how social agents use semiotic resources in practice” (2007: 136). It may be that ethnomusicologists do not always consider themselves semioticians, but they certainly have been using this theoretical paradigm for years now, as they study meaning in musical practice.⁹

Such a framework is also well known in anthropology. Fredrik Barth writes: “we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences. The features that are taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant…some cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are played down and denied” (1998: 14). Likewise, Clifford Geertz favors “actor-oriented” descriptions and interpretations with a focus on meaning. He writes:

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⁹ Take for instance Kazadi wa Mukuna’s article on the issue of “Africanisms” in diaspora, which he shows to be better described as “Americanisms” or “Latin Americanisms.” He covers in detail the changing functions of African imports over time, and how they are assigned new meanings—and thus they survive, or how they fail to generate new meanings and are thus relegated to museums. Kazadi wa Mukuna, “Creative Practice in African Music: New Perspectives in the Scrutiny of Africanisms in Diaspora,” *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Autumn 1997): 244, 248. To me, Kazadi wa Mukuna’s work perfectly fits Vannini’s model as described above. I will add, however, that although I disagree that Vannini has coined an innovative framework, what he describes—and what Kazadi (and Christopher A. Waterman 1990, Jane C. Sugarman 1999, and J. Martin Daughtry 2006) have done—is an effective way of studying meaning and will be employed here.
"...descriptions...must be cast in terms of the constructions we imagine [them] to place upon what they live through, the formulae they use to define what happens to them."

Nevertheless, he also stresses that these descriptions are not the actors’, but instead are interpretations of interpretations (in Paul Bohannan and Mark Glazer, ed. 1988: 540).  

While it is the intention of this work to shed light on Welsh identity-creators’ own perceptions of Welsh cultural identity or “Welshness,” it is recognized that their interpretations and reinterpretations are interpreted yet again by the author.

In addition to this work from other disciplines, Thomas Turino’s framework—similar to these that came before it, but specifically designed for music—is also employed in this dissertation. Turino succinctly explains how songs can be used as signs of identity. Taking Peirce’s ideas about the nature of signs, he explains that musical signs largely work at indexical levels (1999: 228). This suggestion explains how when one hears a song, a meaning can be referenced. For example, when one hears “The Star Spangled Banner,” he/she may access information about American patriotism. Thus, that may be described as the individual’s perceived meaning(s). However, as Turino points out, the same song can elicit an infinite variety of such meanings: to someone else hearing the tune, what is accessed might be the beginning of a sporting event, to another, shameful American imperialism (Turino 1999: 227).

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10 Geertz proposes this methodology to prevent both the reification of culture as a superorganic reality and the reduction of culture to “the brute pattern of behavioral events” or a mere counting of traits. Instead, he suggests an interpretive analysis in search of meaning: “As interworked systems of construable signs (what, ignoring provincial usages, I would call symbols), culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described” (in Paul Bohannan and Mark Glazer, ed. 1988: 535, 539). Geertz also discusses acts as signs, noting that “it is through the flow of behavior (more precisely, social action) that cultural forms find articulation,” explaining that one gains access to symbol systems by “inspecting events” (in Paul Bohannan and Mark Glazer, ed. 1988: 538, 541-2). He proposes a view of human behavior as symbolic action—that is, something that signifies—and emphasizes the need to search for meaning (1973: 10). Such a framework is at the center of this dissertation.
He also rightly points out that musical referencing is even more problematic because various sign vehicles—pitch patterns, rhythm patterns, certain instrumentation—can trigger meanings simultaneously, making any musical example a bundle of signs. Furthermore, new layers of meaning are added based on the present context, even when former associations still exist. Turino calls this “a kind of semantic snowballing” (1999: 235). Thus, any musical example is a nebulous semiotic resource and has the tendency to trigger multiple associations, both for one individual and certainly among any number of individuals, and then new meanings are often ascribed in subsequent hearings. In other words, music has a high potential of being a jumbled mess of semiosis.  

_Beyond Semiotics: Cognition and Cultural Identity_  

One way to disentangle this mess is by looking at the mental states involved in the use of music in constructing an identity. Creating and comprehending music and culture are quintessential acts of cognition. As such, this research benefits from theories and empirical evidence from various other disciplines, including cognitive science. Of particular interest are theories of knowledge representation, or how humans organize information in memory. People’s knowledge of music, their culture, and episodes from their lives reside in their declarative memory system.  

Declarative memory includes

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11 Turino’s framework for how songs can be signs of identity is used here only in part; details appear in the review of the literature, Chapter II.

12 There are at least three memory systems in the brain. “Working memory” is a combination of short-term memory storage (holding things temporarily) and attention processing (processing the world around you in real time). “Procedural memory” is our system of knowledge for sequence events and patterns. It includes learning skills like driving, language, and playing instruments. It is typically, but not always, _implicit_, meaning it is largely not available for conscious access. For example, when you are driving, you do not have to consciously access every subtle movement needed to shift, you just do it. In other words, procedural memory is knowledge _how_ to do something. “Declarative memory,” on the other hand, is divided into two parts: semantic memory (facts and concepts) and episodic memory
both facts and concepts—known as “semantic memory”—and autobiographical events—called “episodic memory.” In short, declarative memory is home to personal memories and more structured information that comes from those memories. These representations are not fixed, but rather they are restructured and/or reinforced with experience and recollection.

While an extensive explanation of the memory systems of the brain would be beyond the scope of both my knowledge and this dissertation, declarative memory is worth discussing here since this would be the system used for one’s knowledge about Wales and Welsh culture, informed by individual experiences of these things. The fact that autobiographical experience informs this knowledge explains in part the individual nature of cultural identity. Put simply, each person’s understanding of Welshness is comprised of knowledge of facts and concepts concerning Wales and all things Welsh, bound up with personal, individual experiences of these facts and concepts. This means that Welshness would entail access to both factual knowledge in semantic memory—e.g., the national anthem of Wales is X, the Welsh flag looks like X—and autobiographical knowledge in episodic memory—e.g., my mother and I used to sing X, we won the eisteddfod in 2005.

(autobiographical experience). This system is typically, but not always, explicit, meaning it is available for conscious access; it other words, it is what we know we know. Declarative memory is knowledge of something, both facts and concepts and experiential knowledge of them. All three work systems work in tandem. It should also be pointed out that other systems in the brain work together with our memory systems, e.g., the visual cortex works when we “picture” something from our memory in our mind’s eye. It is not entirely clear exactly how the other memory systems (procedural memory and working memory) are involved in cultural identity; presumably, procedural memory would be keeping track of sequences of activity and relationships between activities, and working memory is processing visual and aural stimuli. This information on memory systems in the brain was informed by Phillip Hamrick, fellow in psycholinguists at Georgetown University (personal communication) and Michael T. Ullman, “A neurocognitive perspective on language: The declarative/procedural model,” Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 2 (2001): 717-726 online at http://brainlang.georgetown.edu/PUBS/Ullman_NatRevNS_01.pdf (accessed 20 January 2011).
Two theoretical constructs that clarify some of these ideas are mental frames and cognitive models. The first term is borrowed from frame semantics, a subfield of cognitive science. It describes how knowledge is organized, namely in coherent knowledge structures (see Evans, 2007: 85-6). Rather than simple, concrete items, frames are bundles of knowledge that include facts, ideas, memories, and the relationships between them. For example, the concept of buy requires access to a frame of knowledge, including knowledge about transfer of goods, money, the buyer, the seller, the typical types of exchanges between buyer and seller, and the relationships among all of these elements. Again, bound up with this concept are both facts about buying and one’s own personal experiences of buying.

The creation of a cultural identity can be thought of as the creation of a large frame, which yields a coherent, yet complex concept of—in this case—Welshness. Like any frames, these will be highly individual, since knowledge is acquired through personal experiences. For many, specific songs and musical behaviors—like joining a choir—are among the signs or representations tied to this frame. In other words, these are things that “go together” in their minds. Depending on how strong the connections are, accessing one representation most likely activates others (Koch 2004: 241). For instance, for some, accessing choral membership will activate other concepts that also signify feelings of Welshness. Thus, for these individuals, choral membership and choral repertoire are inextricably linked to being Welsh. In other words, their “Welshness” frame includes choral singing and choral songs; these are part of their knowledge of what it means to be Welsh, based on their own experiences of these things. It is not necessary for elements to be unique to a particular culture; obviously, choral singing is not exclusive to Wales.
Instead, the distinctiveness necessary for cultural identity is defined by some shared elements that individuals have linked together in each of their memories. As shown here, research on frames and memory provides a useful terminology for explaining some of the cognitive aspects of music and identity.

In addition to frame, cognitive model can also be used to describe a phenomenon like Welshness. Cognitive models are abstract bodies of related knowledge (Evans 2007: 23). These are made up of knowledge, personal memories, and connections between the two. Calling Welshness a cognitive model suggests that the creation of Welshness is really a type of abstraction or emergence from a body of knowledge. Signs or access points, which can be thought of as cues or prompts for retrieving knowledge, can be both linguistic and non-linguistic, and they vary from person to person because of the role that individual experience plays. These terms are further elucidated throughout this dissertation, informed by data collected through ethnographic fieldwork.

Meaning as a cognitive process is individual and thus, undeniably personal; however, the context of perceived collective meaning is necessary for cultural analysis. Eric Kline Silverman offers the following: "…this is not to suggest that meaning, as a product of reader's reception, emerges in a sociohistorical vacuum." To this he adds: "I am not arguing that culture can be reduced to individuals as transcendent egos and subjects…rather, individuals, as understood according to local cultural constructs and idioms, are an important locus for cultural analysis…persons read and contribute to the constitution of cultural texts through their participation in cultural fields…” (1990: 152-153). Put simply, meaning—including that which is essential to cultural identity—is created in an individual’s mind, but cultural identity relies on the notion of group
distinctiveness; the group consists of individuals who share a few chosen signs.

The theoretical paradigm that explains the creation of cultural identity and music’s role in this process is drawn from several sources: ethnographic research focuses on musical signs as outlined by both Thomas Turino (1999) and Philip Vannini (2007), while discussions of processing signs as markers of cultural identities are based loosely on theories of symbolic knowledge representation (Evans 2007) and memory systems in the brain (Ullman 2001). Finally, this work draws upon the concept of reinterpreting signs as defined by Melville Herskovits (1948, 1951). Drawing on theoretical work from a variety of disciplines enhances the arguments put forth in this dissertation, and helps to explain the data collected during this research.

Goals and Methodologies

The Role of Language in This Dissertation

One of the problems of this work and any study of musical meaning is that music—unlike language—does not have clear, “agreed-upon” meanings. Language is meant to be economical; it facilitates the assembly of particular meanings—although this is not to say that misunderstandings do not occur. Music, on the other hand, is much more nebulous than language and makes meaning trickier to uncover. Music also accesses information in the mind of the listener, but instead of a particular concept, it often triggers emotional, non-verbal reactions, and perhaps a plethora of thoughts and memories. Turino suggests that it is the very density of what is “called forth” by the musical sign that causes our visceral reactions; in other words, “layers of feeling” are
accessed rather than specific symbolic concepts (1999: 235). Thus, instead of aiding the assembling of specific meanings, music often causes a highly individualistic visceral reaction. This reaction is based on personal experience, even when there exist some shared meanings at some group or larger social level. Perhaps lyrics—in other words, adding language to music—provide a more focused and predictable instruction for meaning in music. However, I still argue for the nebulous nature of music, even music with words. Therefore, when meaning in music is discussed in this dissertation, I am not attempting to state a definitive meaning in a linguistic sense. Instead, I am concerned with signs that are stored with that particular song or activity in the individual’s mind. I follow Ronald Langacker’s explanation of why research in cognition is important for understanding language and apply it also to the study of music and identity. He writes: “I take it as self-evident that meaning is a cognitive phenomenon and must eventually be analyzed as such” (1987: 5).

Older comparisons of music and language—such as those by Bruno Nettl 1958 and William Bright 1963—are discussed. However, the focus is on new studies on the subject, such as those of Aniruddh D. Patel, whose work is largely based on cognitive science. I also discuss language because my fieldwork reveals a preference and a noted value given to lyrics. While it may seem obvious that singers would value lyrics, maybe more so than other musicians, the fact that language is such a powerful sign of Welshness for them—and specifically because emotional, meaningful lyrics are seen as something particularly Welsh—makes the issue one of importance in this dissertation. For instance,

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the singers I spoke with often noted fine poetry as a marker of quality in Welsh musics. They see exceptional lyrics as something that makes Welsh music distinctive. Many clarified that it was not the Welsh language itself that distinguished “very” Welsh lyrics—in fact, some of the Welsh songs discussed are in English. Instead, the power and meaningfulness of the chosen words are notable characteristics. Indeed, one of the stereotypes of Wales is that it is a land of poetry and song, a place that retains ancient bardic traditions. Whether or not these claims hold historical accuracy or validity is not important;\(^\text{14}\) what matters is that some people who create a Welsh identity have an affinity toward poetic words. This is one of the signs bound up in their frames or cognitive models of Welshness.

Beyond these reasons, it would be nearly impossible to discuss Welsh society or any part of Welsh culture in the twentieth century without discussing language, since all Welsh people have been affected to varying degrees by language loss, language learning, and language legislation. Furthermore, language is an important sign of cultural identity for many people. In this research, language is another sign of Welshness for many participants. In addition to providing the historical background for this language discussion, I also present the singers’ feelings about, and experiences of, their own language and the language of others in their musical experiences.

In sum, a linguistic discussion is compulsory because language is a critical issue for the musicians in this dissertation. Moreover, since I am dealing exclusively with songs (i.e., music with lyrics), language affects the repertoire examined here. Finally, musical meaning may have much to gain from more recent studies in cognitive science, which includes certain forms of linguistics (e.g., cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics).

\(^{14}\) This issue is discussed at length in Chapter III.
While previous music studies involving linguistic theories often drew on older ideas from Generative Syntax (see Monelle 1992: 135-161 for an overview), new theories about cognition and language have since been developed. These new theories concerning cognitive models not only provide evidence against generative models of language and the mind, but they also give meaning the central role (see Ronald Langacker 1991 and Paul Whitney 1998), and are therefore relevant to this discussion. Furthermore, they expound upon earlier models of semiotics, providing a more complete picture of how the mind makes meaning, not only from words, but from music as well.

Thus, despite differences between language and music, newer models used to study language may also offer valuable insights into musical meaning. Informed by cognitive science, these models include mechanisms in the brain involved in pattern-recognition and abstraction that may be used for processing both music and language (see Nikolaus Steinbeis and Stefan Koelsch 2008). Ian Cross suggests that the two systems may have developed in tandem, as complimentary components evolving from general social sounds (2008). However they developed, it is clear that they are both often part of cultural identities.

Goals of This Dissertation

The primary focus of this dissertation includes multiple constructions of Welshness, which are created, performed, and strengthened in part through choral membership. One of the specific goals of this dissertation is to shed light on how musical elements act as signs of this identity. Thus, choral membership and repertoire are both explored as signs of singers’ own personal constructions of Welshness. This is achieved
using interviews and printed surveys that ask singers about their individual choices concerning why they belong to their respective choir(s), and what their membership means to them. They are also asked to discuss their perceptions of Welshness and what it is that makes one Welsh. Particular songs and elements of these songs as signs of Welshness are also discussed. Song choices, as well as other interview and survey answers among male, female, young, and elderly singers, demonstrate the individual nature of musical identity signs. However, patterns in these data shed light on social and historical processes that affect and are affected by Welsh choral identity.¹⁵

One of the distinctive goals of this dissertation is to discuss evidence of reinterpretation. One such example is the recent phenomenon in which the Welsh choral institution is undergoing appropriation of pop culture ideals by becoming more glamorous, through televised competitions, the addition of choreography, and increasing popular—and decreasing traditional—repertoire. For example, there is evidence that recent British television shows, and the appeal of travel and popular recognition, could affect the institution and the reasons why people participate in it. Other evidence of reinterpretation includes adult, all-male choral membership that functions as a means for creating friendships and socializing, rather than as a means for fulfilling competitive musical desires.

Furthermore, this research offers insight into the reinterpretation of musical institutions and constructions of cultural identity among North American Welsh choir members. All of the North American choirs featured in this dissertation are comprised of

¹⁵ Texts, meanings, and interpretations, in spite of their fluid, open-ended nature, are situated in specific sociocultural and historico-economic fields, and arise from individual action and social practice (Silverman 1990: 152). The phrase “Welsh choral identity” refers to Welsh cultural identity that is bound up with choral membership and choral music.
both singers of Welsh descent and those who have no Welsh ancestry. The choirs function as celebrators of Welsh heritage and all sing both Welsh-composed and Welsh-language repertoire.

In previous research on an Italian-American community, I showed how a group of Americans continue to create a cultural identity based on signs imported from the culture of their immigrant-ancestors. As discussed above, these signs are not simply passed on, but instead are assigned new meanings in their modern context. The cultural identity created in North America is what in this work I am calling “Blank-American” identity. The word “Blank” reflects the tendency of some Americans to call themselves “X-American,” with X being filled in with their ancestors’ culture. The word “Blank” also construes a possible motivation for this tendency, as qualifying Americaness may serve to fill a psychological and/or social need or void. Such identities can have significant effects on people’s lives, possibly dictating where these individuals choose to live, how they spend their time, and with whom they associate. Obviously, such an identity colors their views of themselves and of others, and such identities are highly meaningful to some. In these cases, their own individual frames for their cultural identity


17 The following factors may cause people to look to their ancestry for signs they can use to form an identity, and thus, feel a sense of distinctiveness. First, the United States (US) is a young country compared to many, so it lacks the long history that people sometimes use to give depth to cultural signs. Secondly, the US is comprised of immigrants with a plethora of signs. Finally, the world in general is being increasingly homogenized by globalization and our media/communication abilities. Therefore, I suggest that for Americans, a sense of distinctiveness can easily be achieved by identifying themselves with the cultures of their ancestors. This identity can serve any number of functions, anything from offering a sense of belonging—to something bigger/older/with more depth—to achieving political or social advantages. It should also be noted that this dissertation includes discussion of not only North Americans from the US, but also from Canada as well. Patterns of similarities and differences in their cultural identities are noted.
are bound up with signs inherited from their immigrant ancestors and the generations since then in their families, which are then reinterpreted to serve current psychological and social needs.

For example, consider a song used in a ritual in the annual Italian-American festival in Lowellville, Ohio. This ritual is often cited as the most important, meaningful, and/or unique aspect of participants’ identity as Italian-Americans. Yet, hardly anyone knows where the song came from, and no one could tell me why it is used. However, they all know it is as a marker of their particular ritual, and they view it as the necessary music that belongs with the ritual, a ritual that is at once unique to their particular community and something brought here by their immigrant-ancestors from southern Italy. Therefore, their frames or cognitive models for “Italian-Americanness”

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18 The melody is a conglomerate of four phrases from Italy’s Bersaglieri military regiment fanfares. The ritual to which it belongs is called “the Baby Doll Dance” in this small Ohio town. This ritual today is a papier-mâché effigy that a man dances inside of while the doll burns and shoots fireworks. This is a symbolic burning of the sins of the previous year, practiced in southern Italy and only, as far as is documented, in Lowellville, Ohio and nearby Aliquippa, Pennsylvania. Reinterpretation has occurred, as the ritual is different in the two American towns. It also varies from immigrants’ descriptions of it in Italy and from previous versions of it in this town as described by older participants. Participants’ own meanings for the ritual are not so much for the burning of sins, but instead the ritual is seen as a signifier of family bonding and pride in their own distinctive southern Italian ancestry. See Jennifer Johnstone 2011: 39-58 and Jennifer Johnstone, in submission.

19 Nearly 88% of people interviewed (29 of 33) answered that they would recognize the Baby Doll Dance music if they heard it outside the festival, but only three of these (all band members) knew it had any military connections; the rest had no idea where the melody originated. In a separate survey, 72% of anonymous Lowellville junior high students (70 of 97) claimed that they would recognize the Baby Doll music outside the festival, but only two knew of any Italian military connections. It should be noted that these interviewees were not tested on their knowledge of the tune, but instead were just asked if they knew it. However, given the number of people who sang it—with and without dancing—during interviews and in my observations from 2002-2004, I have no doubt that the tune is not only known by these participants, but it is clearly and firmly bound to the ritual and is part of their Italian-American cognitive models. This particular melody has been used in this context since 1935. One of my interviewees repeatedly suggested that the choice of this tune was completely arbitrary—he was, incidentally, one of the three people who knew the song’s military origins, and one of the few participants who remembered when this particular song began: he emigrated from Italy to Lowellville, Ohio in 1926. I suggested that its use may have been due to the Baby Doll’s appearance during that era: instead of an effigy-costume, the vehicle for the fireworks was just a man wearing a large felt hat—the Bersaglieri also wear such hats, but this explanation is purely speculation.
contain—among other things—this tune.

Although it will not be referred to extensively, my previous research on Italian-American identity will serve as a backdrop for perceptions of the Welsh-American identities found in North America. This is a topic well worth exploring, particularly because this can clearly be done through the lens of choral membership. Indeed, North Americans with Welsh ancestry have reinterpreted some choral traditions, and in some cases, perceive these as primary markers of their own Welshness.

As with the choral tradition in Wales, this dissertation provides a historical background to North American Welsh choral activities. Understanding Welsh migration to the United States allows one to examine sociohistorical factors that have affected North American signs of Welshness. Constructions of Welshness through the medium of choral singing—in both countries—are compared and discussed. Of particular interest are the signs of Welshness used by the North Americans in lieu of competency in the Welsh language: although language is a salient sign of Welshness among adult choir members in Northwest Wales, it is not common as a communicative system in Canada or the US.  

I was eager to see if North American Welshness parallels Welshness among older singers in Wales. First, because modern British televised choral singing is mostly unavailable in North America, the glamorization of Welsh choral singing would not have necessarily affected views of Wales and Welshness in Canada or the US. Secondly, it is not surprising when descendents of migrant groups use antiquated signs, or otherwise different signs than those used by nationals of their ancestry-country.

For instance, one salient sign of Italian-American cultural identity in Lowellville,  

\[20\] This is discussed at length in Chapters VI and VII.
Ohio is a song entitled “Marcia Reale,” performed during the most significant part of the annual festival mass. This tune was Italy’s national anthem at the time of the immigrants’ arrival, and although its continued inclusion in the ritual remains a sign of this community’s distinctive Italian-American-ness, it is no longer Italy’s anthem, nor does it necessarily function as any sort of identity marker in Italy or among any other Italian-American groups. Similarly, songs that are central to Welshness in Wales are not ones that are central to Welshness in North America. One of the goals of this work is to compare and discuss these creations of Welshness and suggest possible reasons why these identities take the forms they do.

Data Collection in Wales and North America

I lived in Deganwy, Conwy County, in Northwest Wales from September 2008 to late June 2009, observing, interviewing, conversing, and singing with various Welsh choirs during and outside of rehearsals and performances. Having gained the confidence of various choirs, I was able to discover identity markers among singers of both sexes and varying ages. A map of the area in which I conducted fieldwork21 appears below:

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21 Phrases like “North Wales” and “South Wales” were commonly heard during my year in Wales (2008-2009), and often appear in literature about Wales and Welsh culture. My fieldwork here was conducted primarily in Conwy and Gwynedd counties, near the northern coast, which is specifically called “North Wales.” However, there was also a participating choir from what is sometimes distinguished as “West Wales,” one from Denbighshire (north-central), and a couple from Anglesey (an island off the northwest coast). Moreover, I did not conduct research among any choirs in the far eastern part of North Wales. As such, I have labeled the geographic area “Northwest” to best account for the participating choirs and the area itself. Only one Welsh choir appearing in this dissertation, Only Men Aloud (OMA), comes from the South Wales (Cardiff, specifically). Issues of geographic place and identity are discussed further in Chapters II and III. A map is provided to show the area of my ethnographic work, which was concentrated in Gwynedd and Conwy counties, with additional choirs from Anglesey, and one each from Denbighshire and Ceredigion.
Figure 1. A map of the Welsh counties since 1996. The counties were redrawn in 1974 and again in 1996; there were only eight counties from 1974-1996. In 1996, Conwy (no. 19 below) was carved out of the then-larger Gwynedd County (no. 17). Anglesey (no. 18) was also part of Gwynedd prior to 1996, and Denbighshire (no. 20) was part of a larger, Northeast county called Clwyd. The bulk of the fieldwork for this dissertation was conducted in Conwy and Gwynedd Counties (nos. 17 and 19 below, shaded). It should be noted that “Conwy” is also the name of a town (and valley) within Conwy County and appears elsewhere in this dissertation. Map and information used with permission, courtesy of Gareth Hicks 2012.

1. Vale of Glamorgan
2. Cardiff
3. Newport
4. Monmouthshire
5. Torfaen
6. Blaenau Gwent
7. Caerphilly
8. Merthyr Tydfil
9. Rhondda Cynon Taff
10. Bridgend
11. Neath & Port Talbot
12. Swansea
13. Carmarthenshire
14. Pembrokeshire
15. Ceredigion [Cardiganshire]
16. Powys
17. Gwynedd
18. Anglesey
19. Conwy
20. Denbighshire
21. Flintshire
22. Wrexham

When my own fieldwork is mentioned as the source of information in this dissertation, it comes as the result of these two distinctive bodies of data-collection: one in Wales (2008-2009) and one in North America (2009-2011). Within each of these bodies of data, there are two types of information. The first includes in-depth conversations and interviews. In Northwest Wales, these were conducted with members of three choirs. These are choirs among whom I spent the most time in Wales, observing their rehearsals and performances throughout the year: Côr Meibion Maelgwn, an all-

22 Côr is Welsh “choir,” meibion “male.” Thus, Welsh all-male choirs are typically named Côr Meibion followed by their town name or some other geographic marker (e.g., Maelgwn is not a town name, but instead a mythological/historical figure associated with the choir’s region. Origins of choir names are discussed further in Chapters II and III). In Wales, when any of these are translated into English, the
male choir, Côr Cymysg Dyffryn Conwy, a choir of male and female adults, and Ysgol Glanaethwy/ Côr Glanaethwy, a choir consisting of male and female teenagers. I also collected surveys from volunteers among the above choirs, as well as members of the following choirs: Côr Meibion y Foel, Côr Meibion Dinbych A’r Cylch, Côr Meibion Llanrwst Ar Cylch, and Côr Meibion y Penrhyn (male choirs), Côr Merched Bro Nest (an all-female adult choir from west Wales), and Côr Ieuenctid Môn (a youth choir). I will specify “interview” for the first and “survey” or “questionnaire” for the second, although both were accompanied by lengthy conversations in many cases, as several singers were willing to chat in more depth. In all, I collected 85 printed questionnaires in Northwest Wales. These come from the choirs mentioned above, and I use the choir type labels that phrase “Male Voice Choir” is used in place of Côr Meibion, so Côr Meibion Maelgwn is rendered Maelgwn Male Voice Choir. Côr Meibion was used for twenty years before the English translation of “Male Voice Choir” first appeared in The Musical Times in 1882 (Gareth Williams 1998: 185). I use both the Welsh and English forms. After the names of the choirs are firmly established and discussed, I also occasionally abbreviate the choir names by eliminating the male/female qualifiers, using italics (e.g., Maelgwn for Côr Meibion Maelgwn). I also use the abbreviation for Male Voice Choir that is common in Wales, “MVC.”

23 Ysgol is Welsh “school” and côr (as mentioned above) is “choir.” Both of the these terms are used to describe the senior youth choir (mixed-sex singers, ages 11 to 18) of Ysgol Glanaethwy, a music and drama school just outside of Bangor in Northwest Wales. The school also has a junior choir (also mixed-sex, but ages range from 7 to 10). The school is affiliated with the group Da Capo, a choir comprised of Glanaethwy alumni. The younger choir and the alumni choir were not asked to participate in interviews or surveys. Thus, mention of Ysgol Glanaethwy or Côr Glanaethwy refers specifically to the senior choir.

24 I also observed two other Male Voice Choirs, Côr Meibion Colwyn and Côr Meibion Dyffryn Peris (Colwyn and Dyffryn Peris both refer to geographic locations in Northwest Wales). Since I heard their repertoire, I will bring it into the discussions in Chapters IV and V. However, since they did not participate in interviews and/or surveys, their appearance is minimal in this work. I should add that neither group was necessarily unwilling to help. In fact, I later met a singer from Dyffryn Peris who lamented that we had not met sooner, as he was quite interested in this research. The only reason they were not part of my fieldwork is because I attended their concerts shortly before returning to the US and I simply did not have the opportunity to ask them questions. A conversation/interview with four members of the youth choir Côr Ieuenctid Môn is also featured in Chapter III, although this was not the same interview given to the other choirs named here. The choir Only Men Aloud was also observed, and I interviewed their conductor.
are typical in Wales: Male Voice Choirs or MVCs, Ladies, Mixed, and Youth.\textsuperscript{25} I interviewed 50 singers, including four conductors, in Northwest Wales.

I first gained access to the experiences of North American Welsh choir members through the annual North American Festival of Wales held in Pittsburgh in September 2009.\textsuperscript{26} Here, I had the opportunity to meet both Welsh immigrants and descendents of immigrants living in the US and Canada. There were also participants who were not of Welsh descent, but who nonetheless value their membership in what I am calling a “Welsh-focused” choir, meaning the group sings pieces by Welsh composers, and some Welsh-language repertoire, too. Most notably, I was able to interview several members of Côr Cymry Gogledd America, which in English is The North American Welsh Choir. I asked them the same questions about songs and choral membership as I had previously asked the singers in Northwest Wales. Other North American choirs featured in this research include The Toronto Male Voice Choir and Côr y Mynydd Glas and Cantorion from Green Mountain College in Vermont. Both in-person and online interviews and surveys were collected from these singers and conductors in 2009, 2010, and 2011. In all, I conducted 21 interviews and collected 21 surveys for the North American portion of this research.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{25} I am capitalizing choir types for clarity and consistency. One Youth choir (Côr Ieuencid Môn) included singers aged 7 to 16, though only four girls, ages 14 to 16, participated. The second Youth choir (Ysgol Glanaethwy) ranged in age from 11 to 18. From the latter, both males and females participated, with ages ranging from 14 to 18.

\textsuperscript{26} The festival is centered around music, particularly hymn singing, but also now includes music competitions, concerts by professional Welsh musicians, and informal music performance sessions. See Welsh National Gymnania Ganu Association, The North American Festival of Wales, http://www.nafow.org/NAFOW/nafow_hm.html (accessed 12 April 2009) and Chapter VI of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{27} I also collected 15 additional (altered) surveys from non-choir members at The North American Festival of Wales 2011, for use in future research (see Chapter VII).
The Particular Contributions of This Dissertation

With this body of data, this dissertation compares musical activities—both lost and reinterpreted—among the Welsh in Wales and among the Welsh migrants and their descendents in North America. Comparisons to my previous research on Italian-American identity will be used sparingly, but may offer further insight into “Blank-American” identity and its relationship with music and musical practices. In keeping with my methodology, my interest is in meanings assigned to musical activities, including choral membership and competitive and non-competitive choral singing, and to particular songs, and traits within these songs. Specifically, I look at how these musical signs are used in constructing Welshness.

This research on music and cultural identity is significant not only in its scope but also in the use of quantitative data, which enhances the qualitative data obtained through participant-observation and interviewing. While printed questionnaires are nothing new in identity studies or ethnomusicology (see for instance Russell F. Farnen, ed. 1994 and Dale A. Olsen 2004), I use them here to explore more deeply why songs mean what they mean to singers. The surveys also show quantifiable patterns among groups differentiated by age and sex.

I also perform statistical analyses on some of these data. Such statistical procedures are common in both experimental and survey-based research in psychology and linguistics (Field 2009; Mackey and Gass 2005). One of the statistical analyses used here is correlational. That is, it examines two variables to determine if they reliably co-occur, and change in tandem with one another. Such analyses allow one to determine, for instance, whether music associated with Welshness is in some way related to the singer’s
age, sex, native language or other social factors. As such, it shows which factors co-occur, and also how strong these correlations are. Correlational analyses cannot say that social factors cause various perceptions of Welsh identity and Welsh music—correlation is not causation—but instead, they are used to show if any consistent patterns exist and warrant discussion. Relationships between signs of Welshness and different social factors are then interpreted to shed light not only on how, but also on why Welshness varies among singers of different ages and sexes.

The second statistical analysis allows one to determine differences between two variables, even if all other variables have been removed or kept constant. For example, it determines whether or not there are significant differences in the responses of men and women, or of one age group versus another. It helps to prevent confounds when there are multiple variables involved, such as age, language abilities, sex, nationality, and allows one to decipher the effects of specific variable on others.

Although these rigorous statistical analyses are not typically employed in ethnomusicological writing, quantitative approaches—primarily through the use of questionnaires—are not new in ethnographic fieldwork. Combining qualitative and quantitative analyses is common practice in the social sciences. Furthermore, interdisciplinary research is part of the backbone of ethnomusicology. Therefore, statistical analyses of the data are useful here for determining co-occurrences of social factors and particular music and musical behaviors. Thus, although traditional ethnomusicological qualitative ethnographic research is still at the heart of the present study, the interpretation of these data is facilitated in part by statistical procedures on the quantifiable data. As such, the dissertation’s methodologies remain true to
ethnomusicology’s scientific aim, because it allows me to more soundly interpret the data and discuss how social and cognitive phenomena may affect the creation of Welshness. It is well documented that people link music and cultural identity—this dissertation examines not only how, but also why.

This dissertation provides a thorough study of constructions of Welsh cultural identity, created in part through—and in turn, causing and affecting—choral membership and choral repertoire. The theoretical paradigm is semiotic as I show real-life uses and meanings of cultural signs, both in Northwest Wales and through several generations in North America. Fieldwork among a variety of choirs in Wales included participant-observation, interviews and conversations, and printed questionnaires. Similar research was repeated in September 2009 at the Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu Association’s North American Festival of Wales, and continued online and through personal contacts made with North American singers in Welsh-focused choirs during 2010 and 2011.

In Northwest Wales, choral singing remains a highly recognized and highly respected cultural institution. A chronological history of the institution is presented, and changes in form and function in both membership and repertoire are noted. Additional attention is paid to more recent changes from the past ten to forty years. For instance, Male Voice Choirs—the most salient, if not stereotypical, of the Welsh choirs—once primarily associated with South Wales’ mining communities, are increasing in numbers in Northwest Wales. Moreover, these choirs have an increasingly aging membership and audience.

Despite the continued salience of this all-male singing group, the Welsh choral institution is full of mixed-sex choirs with an overwhelming female majority.
Furthermore, many choirs of all types are increasingly incorporating popular repertoire and choreography. Thus, the Welsh choirs’ membership, image, and repertoire are undergoing many changes. I argue that the changes in the Welsh choral institution described in this dissertation demonstrate reinterpretation that may ensure the survival of the institution in Wales. This and other evidence of reinterpretation is a major component of this work.

In North America too, it appears that choral singing is often bound up in frames or cognitive models of Welshness. This is not surprising given that Wales was being promoted as “The Land of Song” and a place of chapels and choirs during a period of intensive migration from Wales to the US and Canada (Cf. Gareth Williams 1998: 31, Prys Morgan 1986: 35). As in my earlier Italian-American study, the descendents of the North American Welsh immigrants have taken music and musical practices from their immigrant-ancestors and reinterpreted them to use as signs of their own identity. I suggest that these musical elements are the primary signs in their own cognitive models of Welshness.

One of the aims of this dissertation is to understand cultural identity through music and musical behaviors by looking at what other concepts are “bundled with” the notion of being Welsh in a singer’s mind. Furthermore, do these models, generated by individual personal experience, exhibit any patterns of similarities among singers of different sexes and generations? My discussion of Welshness is done then with respect to linked-up signs in memory from which it emerges. Cognitive models provide means for organizing experiential knowledge of something, in these cases it is what one feels about, knows of, and has experienced of Wales and Welsh culture. My primary goal is an
understanding of music in Welshness, informed by a variety of singers’ choral experiences in Northwest Wales and North America.

Strong associations made between choral singing and being Welsh suggest that choral membership and choral music are bound up with Welshness. Obviously, individual models are affected by numerous and varied social and historical factors, and shaped by each person’s own thoughts and experiences. Patterns in the data suggest sociohistorical effects, but the project still illuminates and emphasizes the use of choral membership and songs as signifiers of individual cognitive models of Welshness. Yet despite the individuality of the models, it is only through sharing some of the signs of these models that individuals feel part of the same distinctive group, i.e., part of the same culture.

This dissertation is valuable in its interdisciplinary approach, specifically in its inclusion of new theories from cognitive science, including how knowledge is stored and accessed in memory systems. These theories shed light on how cultural identity might be created, and how and why music and musical activities can be central signs bound up with identity. Furthermore, in addition to traditional qualitative fieldwork research on music and musical activities, quantitative research is also present in the form of statistical analyses on. This ensures the most rigorous and thorough assessment of the fieldwork data.

This dissertation is noteworthy in part because it provides a unique comparison of North American Welsh music and musical activities with those in Wales, showing how North American Welsh choral identities differ from those of the Welsh. Little research
has been done on the Welsh choirs from Northwest Wales,\textsuperscript{28} and little research has been done on Welsh music as it relates specifically to Welsh identity (cf. Gareth Williams 1998). Moreover, there has been little research on the music of the Welsh-descended North Americans, so this project fills several gaps in the research.\textsuperscript{29} Specifically, this dissertation goes beyond description of choirs, and looks instead at the individual singers’ experiences, showing how social factors such as age, language, sex and gender, geographic location, and religious background play into singers’ perceptions of Welshness. This allows me to view their highly-individual responses in a larger sociohistorical context. Finally, this dissertation covers modern trends in popular media portrayals of the choral institution, primarily through televised choral competitions in the United Kingdom (UK). With this, I look at the most recent changes to the choral tradition in Wales, and speculate on how and why it is changing.

Among the many questions answered in this dissertation are how changes in the Welsh choral institution affect and are affected by Welshness, why people participate in

\textsuperscript{28} There may be work of which I am unaware, particular in Welsh. But based on English-language texts I could access, there appears to be very little written on the choral tradition in North Wales, which is the more rural, less industrially-developed half of the country. There is one new book I refer to in later chapters: Meurig Owen, \textit{North Wales Male Voice Choirs}, Pwllheli, Gwynedd: Llygad Gwalch, 2009. Owen’s book features a history of forty-five MVCs from North Wales, all via oral tradition (a few of the conductors I interviewed told me they had been interviewed by him as well). There is also a short introduction on Welsh music history. He concludes (pp. 213-15) with a brief discussion of the \textit{Welsh Association of Male Voice Choirs} (founded in 1962), which is responsible for the Massed Festival of Male Choirs in London’s Royal Albert Hall. I use Owen’s book sparingly, as my own fieldwork yielded more specifically relevant information, since the choirs’ histories are not my focus. However, some of his historical descriptions are used to corroborate or add to my own findings. In this book, Owen confirms that there is little research on North Wales’ choirs, as written records of them are scarce.

\textsuperscript{29} There is ample research on Welsh identity as it relates to language and religion (Jenkins and Williams 2000 and Chambers and Thompson 2005, respectively). There is also research on Welsh music traditions (Rimmer 1986, Blyn-Ladrew 1998). A team from Cardiff University has recently studied Welsh American identities (Bishop et al., 2003, Wray et al. 2003, Garrett et al. 2005, Coupland et al. 2006). However, these authors are linguists, so their discussions of music and musical activities are sparse. The only substantial research I could find on Welsh music and musical activities in North America is in Linda Pohly’s 1989 dissertation, and this focuses exclusively on the nineteenth century.
Welsh and Welsh North American choirs, and what musical and non-musical signs signify Welshness for singers in both Wales and North America. The dissertation also shows patterns of sign interpretation and uses among male, female, and age-specific groups, and discusses how language and other factors are involved in Welsh cultural identity. In sum, this dissertation shows the following: how songs, choral membership, and other signs are used to create Welshness; how singers view their own Welshness and the Welshness of others; and how musical signs are created and used among North Americans in Welsh-focused choirs, and how these compare to those in Northwest Wales. Historical and social factors—including age, gender, geographic location, language, and popular media—and how they affect singers’ perceptions of Welsh choral singing and their own Welsh cultural identity are discussed. Finally, this dissertation shows how the Welsh choral institution is changing and being reinterpreted on both sides of the Atlantic.
CHAPTER II: MUSICAL AND NON-MUSICAL SIGNS OF WELSHNESS

A Review of the Literature

Identity in Ethnomusicology

In 1990, Christopher Waterman published an article on popular music and the creation of Yoruba identity.¹ One of his claims is that popular music does not just make history as a form of social action “directed at realizing a future, but also as a medium for the retrospective definition of tradition” (1990: 369). This is paralleled in Wales, where new choirs are being established, adding modern popular repertoire and choreography to the institution. Interviewees suggest that MVCs, the most salient and stereotypical of the Welsh choirs, are still considered the “most traditional” type of choir, despite the fact that all choir types—including Mixed—have been abundant for as many years. Also notable is the fact that these MVCs sing increasingly more popular music, much more than other choirs who are not considered as “traditional.”

Other relevant arguments made by Waterman include his assertion that Yoruba identity is affected by “external perspectives” (1990: 372). Here, Waterman recognizes the role played by those outside the group in coloring how those who create this identity view their culture and themselves. It is well documented that being historically labeled as an “other” can be embraced and used to gain agency; see Sarah Hill (2007: 197-199) for an example from Welsh pop music. Perceptions of Welshness from both inside and outside these populations are discussed in this dissertation.

Waterman’s definition of cultural identity as being “relational and conjectural, rather than self-constructing and essential” (1990: 377) is appropriate given what is known about how the mind stores and processes chunks of knowledge, including cultural identities. Furthermore, the fact that Waterman suggests cultural identity to be non-essential is notable. Cultural identity is dependent upon personal experiences. Not only does this make cultural identities infinitely varied, but it means that not everyone at all times finds a cultural identity meaningful; the identity must provide some advantage, whether psychological, social, economical, or other.2

Finally, there is one point in which I diverge from Waterman’s work. He suggests distinguishing between invented traditions, in which continuity with the past is demonstrably contrived, and what he calls “stereotypic reproduction,” when supposedly factual accounts cannot be entirely separated from elaborations (1990: 377). I do not think such a distinction is necessary. It is clear from the data in this dissertation that even “demonstrably contrived” signs can be just as meaningful as those “stereotypic reproductions.” The broad use of the theory of reinterpretation in this dissertation covers both types of signs, making Waterman’s distinctions irrelevant.3


3 Traditions described as old and/or continuous are often recent constructions (cf. Eric Hobsbawm 1983). One example is the eisteddfod. Although it has roots at least as old as the Middle Ages, it exhibited notable changes in form throughout its history: rules were established in the sixteenth century, and rituals and certain events were added in the nineteenth century (Rimmer 1986: 80-1, Gareth Williams 1998, The National Eisteddfod of Wales. “Gorsedd of the Bards,” http://www.eisteddfod.org.uk/english/content.php?nID=43 (accessed 17 September 2011). Since all cultural signs are made one’s own to greater or lesser degrees, using the term reinterpretation in such a broad sense covers this inevitable process of change. It also allows one to avoid the term “invented,” which is sometimes interpreted as a derogatory descriptor of traditions—even when any such value judgment was not intended (cf. Linnekin 1992: 249). Moreover, reinterpretation stresses the fluidity of
Nine years after Waterman’s article, *Ethnomusicology* published an article by Jane Sugarman about Albanian nationalism.⁴ In it, Sugarman discusses issues similar to those in this dissertation, including inclusiveness/exclusiveness and evocations of the country’s beauty in song lyrics. She also discusses regional identity, and identity formerly based on religion giving way to one mainly hinging on language (1999: 422-424). Her work is paralleled in this research, in which Welsh songs and song lyrics are discussed in relation to the singers’ sense of a more or less exclusive Welshness.

Furthermore, religious signs—though central to the development of the Welsh choral institution—are becoming less important as markers of Welshness in Wales. Instead, both language and geography—the latter focused on region allegiances within Wales—are primary signs of Welshness.

Additionally, Sugarman writes about Albanian expatriates, and how poetry encourages their longing for the homeland, and thus their support for Albania’s political struggles (1999: 429-430). A similar phenomenon is discussed for the Welsh-descended North Americans in this dissertation. Of particular relevance is research conducted by a team from Cardiff University⁵ and my own fieldwork, which examines Welsh identities outside of Wales, including how, why, and when feelings of Welshness emerge.

Other parallels between this dissertation and Sugarman’s work include the latter’s discussion of the notion of a medieval Albania being reborn as a modern state (1990:

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⁵ See Alison Wray, et al. (2003), Hywel Bishop et al. (2003), Peter Garrett et al. (2005), and Nikolas Coupland, et al. (2006).
and my own discussions of medieval Welshness and even older ancient British and/or Celtic identities. These are being evoked as a source of pride in light of Wales’ twentieth-century struggles for increased political and legislative powers.

Finally, Sugarman examines gender roles when she discusses warfare and its reawakening of traditional patriarchal tendencies (1999: 446-7). My own work briefly examines gender roles in the choral institution. Specifically, women’s perceptions of the MVC tradition are discussed in this dissertation. In an endnote (1999: 454), Sugarman suggests that Albanian-language songs are important for uniting the Albanian diaspora and articulating their concerns. Likewise, in this dissertation, I show how Welsh-language songs are used in a similar fashion in North America, even though most people are not competent in the language there.

Another article that parallels the current research is Richard Jones-Bamman’s work on Saami identity in Scandinavia; several of his arguments directly parallel issues in Wales and Welsh music. For instance, Jones-Bamman discusses the topic of traditional versus modern musics as identity markers. He also explains how musicians take traditional musical styles and modify them, which choirs in this dissertation also do. The result of both the Saami and the Welsh examples is similar: the modernizing of traditional forms contributes to a revival of interest in the older forms of traditional music. For example, increasing interest in choral singing in Wales has sparked some renewals of *penillion* singing, a type of poetic recitation set to harp accompaniment.

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7 Ibid., 356-358.
One other similarity between Jones-Bamman’s work and this dissertation is the presence of dedicated Saami and Welsh (respectively) record labels and radio stations (2006: 353). As in Norway and Sweden, in Wales these institutions encourage minority-language pop music. Alternately, Jones-Bamman writes about a musician who refused to sing in anything but Saami, despite the fact that few could speak the language, and even fewer could understand his particular dialect (2006: 356). In the present fieldwork, most singers were equally comfortable and willing to sing in both English and Welsh. Sarah Hill gives examples of Welsh pop singers who likewise embrace their bilingualism (2007: 193-200).  

In 2010, Timothy Rice published an article expressing his concern over such identity studies. Specifically, he laments the absence of theoretical discussion in “article-length ethnographies on the theme of music and identity” (2010: 320). Examining sixteen articles about this topic, he found that none cited any literature or theories about identity from other disciplines traditionally drawn upon in ethnomusicology (e.g., anthropology). He also notes that none of these authors cited any of the others (2010: 320-321). He makes specific reference to a theoretical seventeenth article (Thomas Turino 1999), and suggests that all identity studies after it should refer to

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8 It should be noted that this reference to Hill is simplified; she couches these facts in a larger discussion of bands maintaining their “otherness,” and using English lyrics for a more lucrative appeal to a wider audience.

9 Rice analyzed a corpus of seventeen articles appearing in Ethnomusicology from 1982 to 2006, which had either “identity” or “identities” in the title. One article was theoretical (Thomas Turino 1999).

10 Obviously, this dissertation is not an “article-length” work, and should therefore be exempt from Rice’s concerns. Although I do address the items he would like to see in identity studies, I agree with Agawu (2010: 326-329) that it may be impossible (or at least, not advantageous) to cite as much literature or the specific types of literature he calls for. Indeed, if I were to make this into a shortened, “article-length” work, I would eliminate the detailed review of previous research in ethnomusicology. However, I would still most likely at least refer to the names of these others who have worked on this topic.
it in some way—i.e., use the theory, modify it, or reject it. One of the trickiest questions Rice (2010: 323)—and also Richard Feinberg (personal communication)—ask is how music differs from things rooted in language in contributing to cultural identity. For example, music is generally more nebulous than language, but what about poetry? How do lyrics complicate this discussion? These issues are discussed using the data in this dissertation to shed light on cultural identity creation and music’s role in it.

In addition to addressing Rice’s question about music’s role in identity, and fulfilling his desire for references to other ethnomusicological studies of identity, this dissertation also draws—at least in part—upon Turino’s work. However, Turino’s interest is in creating a taxonomy of signs; specifically, he focuses on the differences between icons, indexes, and symbols, plus categories within each of these types—qualisign, sinsign, and legisign.\footnote{Turino suggests that music operates at both iconic and indexical levels, but I exclude iconic in favor of the purely indexical, merely because I think this term more clearly emphasizes the associative nature of musical signs. Turino’s example of iconicity in music is the inclusion of musical quotations, traces of other pieces, and form. He also cites Becker and Becker (1981) and Steven Feld (1988) in suggesting that music resembling other parts of the social experience are considered “good” or “right,” and how these function to create social identity (1999: 234). He adds to this music that resembles physiological phenomena: his example is a rising melodic line that increases in volume and tempo, suggesting that this is iconic for anxiousness. He does not mention “embodied cognition,” though that is in fact what he is suggesting: embodied cognition is a concept suggesting the centrality of our body’s particular perceptual and motor capacities in cognition (see Cowart 2005). Following this, our meaning of “tension” in music is rooted in our experience of increasing heart rate and higher-pitched voices—things that happen on a physiological level when we are under duress. However, unlike Turino, I am less concerned with the types of signs as they fit into semiotic terminology; instead, I am focusing on what signs singers perceive as part of their own Welshness. In other words, the focus here is on what associations are part of singers’ cognitive models of Welshness—what signs access others that are bound up with Welshness.} Turino’s careful differentiation of different sign types is well-argued but not useful with the data in this dissertation. While I do attempt to uncover what about chosen songs make them particularly powerful signs of Welshness, I disregard Turino’s semiotic terminology in favor of simple qualities of the music.
including language, meaning of the lyrics, and the performer(s), as explained by the participants.

Turino distinguishes between signs that are language-based and those that are not. He excludes symbols as primary means by which meaning is created in music because, following Peirce, his definition of a symbol is limited to only those things mediated through language (1999: 227). However, arbitrary or not, symbols (i.e., words) tap into complex cognitive models, which are mostly comprised of non-linguistic conceptual knowledge (Evans 2007: 23). Thus, even signs that are mediated through language share similarities with those that are not (e.g., music): for example, both use similar mechanisms and both access the conceptual system (cf. Patel 2008). Therefore, although

12 For instance, consider the word “cheese.” This form has a generally agreed-upon “meaning;” that is, all English speakers hear this and know basically what it is referring to. But how do they know? “Cheese” accesses all knowledge about cheese, including not just how to say the word and when to use it, but also types of cheese and whether or not one likes to eat cheese, along with associations varying from “Wisconsin” to “yellow” to “crackers” to “Lactose Intolerance,” which all contribute to making up the meaning of this word for each individual, depending upon personal experiences. Turino says of language-bound concepts: “... when we explain that ‘a cat is a furry animal,’ both ‘furry’ and ‘animal’ are general language-bound concepts. We can experience what the feeling of furriness is by patting an actual cat, but we can not designate the general feeling without symbols anymore than we can reproduce the sensation through them. The symbolic function of language is what allows us to think in, and express, generalities. Yet because they are mediational signs which do not resemble, or can be removed from direct connections with their objects, symbols can not reproduce the feelings and experiences of those objects” (1999: 228). However, what Turino does not include is how words can reproduce sensations; that is, they can produce simulations of the feelings and experiences of objects or actions (see Zwaan 2009: 1143). Zwaan cites several experiments showing “that a linguistic stimulus, which was previously thought to be arbitrary, amodal, and abstract, apparently triggers a particular kind of motor behavior...” (2009: 1142-3). To use Turino’s example, talking about a cat’s furriness might actually activate the same areas in our brains that are active when we are actually patting a cat. What Turino is calling a “language-bound concept” may be what Evans explains as a “lexical concept.” Evans defines these as constituting “linguistically encoded concepts—that is conceptual knowledge encoded in a form that can be externalized via language.” However, he stresses that even though lexical concepts are purely linguistic knowledge, they provide “access to a cognitive model profile and thus serve as an access site to encyclopaedic knowledge which is deployed in the service of building a conception” (2007: 123-124). Thus, while language may provide more specific associations than music, it still accesses the conceptual system—including our non-linguistic knowledge, emotions, and episodic memory. Finally, language-mediated signs do not necessarily generate language-based, conscious, or rational responses as Turino suggests they are most likely to do (1999: 234). The point here is that Turino’s different sign types may be more similar than he suggests.
Turino’s and Evans’ theories are broadly compatible, I most often choose the latter for clarity. What I do take from Turino is his assessment of the indexical nature of music.

Relevant Previous Research on Welsh Music and Identity

Research on Welsh language is plentiful (see Jenkins and Williams 2000 for a comprehensive overview). Likewise, research on Welsh religious history and identity (Chambers and Thompson 2005, Gaynor Cohen 2007), and Welsh identity in general, particularly with regards to politics, is easy to find (Glyn Williams, ed. 1978, Osmond, ed. 1985, Graham Day 2002). By comparison, music in Wales as it relates to identity is under-researched. This concern is stated by Gareth Williams, who suggests that research on Welsh music-making “as a prominent constituent of local consciousness and significant shaper of national identity remains relatively unexplored” (1998: 3).

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13 I should emphasize that Evans’ concern is with language, although as explained here, he argues that language accesses both linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge. However, Evans’ terminology, rooted in theories from cognitive science, are particularly relevant in explaining patterns found in the data of the dissertation.

14 Sometimes the mapping (i.e., the creation of meaning) is quicker than it for other signs, or as Turino suggests, the sign provides “direct connections.” In a 1971 experiment, Meyer and Schvaneveldt showed subjects two strings of letters and asked if they were English words. The subjects recognized words more quickly and more accurately when they were associatively/semantically related—bread and butter vs. bread and doctor (Neely 1991: 264-5). Experiments on music also show that context and priming affect listeners’ expectations and thus their processing of chord sequences (Tillman and Bigand 1992). Stronger connections are built through repeated associations.

15 Welsh music history in general, however, has been studied extensively, most notably at the University of Wales, Bangor. The music department’s research areas are divided into composition, musicology, and Welsh music. See http://www.bangor.ac.uk/music/research/group_detail.php?ResGp1=11&Name=Welsh%20Music&SchoolID=0120&SchName= (accessed 23 June 2011).
Since then, there have been few authors working to remedy this gap in the research.\textsuperscript{16} Williams himself provided two important works: the first (in 1998) was a comprehensive account of music and society in Wales from 1840-1914, and the second (2001) was an article on the history of \textit{Côr Meibion Treorci}, a South Wales MVC. Both are used as references in this dissertation, as they include invaluable historical information about the development of the choral institution in Wales.

Also in 1998, Roslyn Blyn-Ladrew published an article about instrumental traditions in Wales from the sixteenth- to the twentieth-centuries. In particular, she focuses on the harp and Romani influences, explaining how and when traditions were revived or “invented” in Wales. This work parallels the present discussion on similarly-created vocal music traditions in Wales. In 2001, Joachen Eisentraut conducted a more localized ethnography, studying \textit{samba} and its role in identity among a small group of people in Bangor, North Wales. Not only is this work in the same geographic area as my own fieldwork, but in it the author argues for identity being created to evoke a distinctiveness that is unrelated to ancestry, a topic also discussed in this dissertation.

During the year I conducted fieldwork in Northwest Wales (2008-2009), Meurig Owen was collecting oral histories from MVCs in North Wales. While my attempts to contact him were unsuccessful, his published work (2009) was primarily descriptive, therefore not directly relevant for this research—the focus here is not on historical description. Brief historical descriptions \textit{are} included in this dissertation merely to provide background information, and Owen’s book serves to corroborate or add to

\textsuperscript{16} I am speaking here of English-language work exclusively, as I do not have the ability to read Welsh-language materials. However, as noted previously, Meurig Owen also suggests a scarcity of research on North Wales’ choral music (2009).
information collected through my own interviews and questionnaires. However, Owen’s book was lacking in interpretation, and as such proves to be only minimally useful to this dissertation.

Studies of popular music in Wales have been more plentiful and more extensive than research on choirs. Consider Meic Llwyelyn’s article (2000) on the relationship between Welsh pop, Welsh language, and Welsh identity.17 The year following Llwyelyn’s article, Ruth Shade published a short article on Welsh rock from the 1960s through the 1990s, focusing on perceptions of the latter decade versus music that came before it.

The most comprehensive work on Welsh pop appeared in 2007, with Sarah Hill’s seminal history of the subject. Even though Hill focuses on pop music, her work is directly applicable to this dissertation for several reasons. One, she shows how Welsh pop is not defined by a distinctive sound as much as it is by associations that surround it (e.g., language). She explains how Welsh pop style is based largely on adaptations of popular Anglo-American or African-American styles, which were in turn based on imported models (e.g., reggae and ska). In other words, there are few stylistic qualities that would sound immediately Welsh to the listener (2007: 29). This parallels the assertion made here that Welshness in Welsh choral music is more about function and context and less about form. Much of the choral music featured here is borrowed from other sources, and when it is of Welsh origins, it does not necessarily always display characteristics that would be obviously Welsh to most listeners.

17 Most relevant to this dissertation is Llwyelyn’s discussion of musician/politician/activist Dafydd Iwan, whose music, emphasizing the struggles to save the Welsh language, is central to some of the singers’ identities in the present research.
Sarah Hill also discusses musics associated with the language struggles of the latter half of the twentieth century. Hill provides a thorough examination of Welsh identity as it pertains to both music and language. For example, she looks at issues of inclusiveness and exclusiveness regarding the use of Welsh or English lyrics, an issue also discussed in the present work.

In addition to the lack of sufficient research on Welsh music and identity, there is also minimal research on music specifically among the Welsh North Americans. Currently, James Cassarino is researching Welsh religious music in North America (personal communication, 2010). Cassarino is the choral director at Green Mountain Valley College in Vermont, whose choir is dedicated to Welsh repertoire, despite the students generally having no Welsh connections. The most-often cited research is that of Linda Pohly, whose dissertation (Ohio State 1989) focuses on the choral tradition of the Welsh immigrants in the nineteenth century. Her work is useful to this dissertation as a reference to the cultural signs that were transported with the Welsh immigrants.

Despite the lack of research dedicated to Welsh music in North America, there is a recent and prolific output of work on North American Welsh identities. Most notably, research from a group of scholars from Cardiff University provides useful discussions of Welsh cultural signs in North America (see Alison Wray, et al. 2003, Hywel Bishop et al. 2003, Peter Garrett et al. 2005, and Nikolas Coupland, et al. 2006). The present work supplements their research, which focuses on the role of language in North American Welsh identities.

\[\text{18 Ronald Lewis has recently (2008) published a thorough history of the Welsh in the US, and this is used to inform the discussion in Chapter VI. However, he does not focus on their musical activities.}\]
The Importance of Language Research

The inclusion of language research in music research is nothing new. In this section, a brief overview of music and language comparisons is presented, as are reasons why modern cognitive science provides adequate methods, theories, and terminologies for the present research. Language is equally critical to this work because this dissertation focuses on singers, music with lyrics, and the Welsh language as a salient sign of Welshness. Following this section is a discussion of the Welsh language’s near-death and potential revival in the past century, and what this means for Welsh singers’ identities today.

One of the original uses of the semiotic theoretical paradigm was in linguistics; specifically with the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure defined the sign as including the signifier itself as well as the signified, or the concept (Nattiez 1990: 4). Saussure also suggested that an utterance only makes sense if one knows all the rules and conventions of the larger structure of which the utterance is a part (Barry 1995: 44). It is not surprising that Saussure's ideas were applied to elements other than language (e.g., in anthropology), nor that linguistics had such a direct impact on these other disciplines in the humanities. For example, structuralists in anthropology were seeking connections, and scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss considered aspects of culture as being manifestations of larger or "deep" structures (1967).

Structuralists generally borrowed three of Saussure's main ideas. First, Saussure suggested that linguistic signs are purely arbitrary; in other words, there is no reason the word "hut" is any way "appropriate" to its meaning (Barry 1995: 41). Second, Saussure noted that meanings are relational; for instance, word meanings require chains of words.
Using the above example, understanding "hut" requires distinguishing it from "shed," "house," "palace." Likewise, Saussure’s concept of paired opposites suggests that some words are defined by the absence of characteristics included in the other (e.g., “night” and “day,” Barry 1995: 42). Finally, Saussure felt that language creates, rather than simply records, our world. Peter Barry offers an excellent example of this using the terms "freedom fighter" and "terrorist," noting how "there is no neutral or objective way of designating such a person, merely a choice of two terms which 'construct' that person in certain ways" (1995: 43).

All of this discussion of meaning in both linguistics and anthropology was soon also applied to music. Lévi-Strauss himself discussed parallels between myth and music (1979). Specifically, he compared phonemes to notes, describing both as sounds with no meanings in and of themselves, which only acquire meaning when strung together. The difference, he suggested, is that phonemes become words, which in turn become sentences, while music—in a sense—goes straight from phoneme to “sentence” by the creation of a melody (1979: 52). However, Lévi-Strauss did not emphasize that meaning in music comes from associations of these “sentences” (melodies) to something outside of them. Therefore, Lévi-Strauss’ discussion here is not directly relevant to the present work. However, in general, he did recognize what is at the heart of cognitive linguistics, including theories used in this dissertation: language and other cultural practices come from general cognitive capacities (Lévi-Strauss in Johnson, 2009: 240).

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19 It is worth noting that Lévi-Strauss recognized his own limitations in that what he was proposing was based exclusively on western classical music (1979: 54). Such limitations are still present in current research on musical meaning (cf. Rebuschat 2012).
Music research had long been borrowing methods and theories from anthropology, particularly in the evolution of what would become ethnomusicology. Moreover, music scholars also employed specifically structuralist approaches, which of course, like Lévi-Strauss’ work, had their roots in Saussure’s linguistics. For example, Meki Nzewi explained how performance-composition employed in Nigeria and the transience of Mbari art reflect the same underlying concept: the philosophy that death or demise is the essence of growth. Of this work, Kazadi wa Mukuna writes: "Nzewi implies that the improvisational creative process in instrumental music, like the Mbari art, is an attainment in itself. It exists as a process of fulfillment during the creation and ceases to exist after its completion" (1997: 239-240).

However, in some cases, language and music were directly compared as communicative systems. In 1963, William Bright drew parallels between language and music, with the obvious uniting factor being sound (1963: 26). Bright also outlined two specific ways in which language and music affect one another. First, there is the well known link between melodic direction and the tones of a tonal language: choice of pitch contour usually reflects linguistic tonal direction. However, for creative purposes, “correct” contour is occasionally sacrificed; in other words, sometimes the tones are

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20 In the late nineteenth century, Guido Adler specifically made reference to what would become this expansive field of study when he separated historical studies of music and systematic studies of music (Merriam 1977: 191-2). In the latter category, he placed vergleichende musikwissenschaft, which was comprised of comparative studies of non-Western musics (Stone 2008: 24). While most European scholars still focused exclusively on European musics, some—including Carl Stumpf and Alexander Ellis—began exploring musics outside of their own culture. By about 1950, the term "comparative musicology" was replaced first by "ethno-musicology" (with a hyphen) and by the end of the decade by "ethnomusicology," without a hyphen (Davis 1992: 8). There was some contention over what musics did and did not qualify as subjects of study in this discipline. Willard Rhodes added the study of "popular music and dance" to his own definition of ethnomusicology in 1956 (1956: 3-4), while Jaap Kunst defined the discipline in 1969 by emphasizing folk music studies and excluding European classical and popular musics (1969: 1). Merriam’s 1964 label of ethnomusicology as the “Anthropology of Music” remains influential (see Stone 2008: 3), and ethnographic fieldwork and participant-observation remain at the core of ethnomusicological research.
subservient to the melody. In addition to pitch contour, speech rhythm also affects music. Again, Bright shows a specific instance using Bruno Nettl’s correlations between accents in Czech language and accents in Czech music. These parallels appear not only in music with lyrics, but in purely instrumental music as well (Bright 1963: 27).

Using linguistic models to explain music, these scholars did not emphasize semantics; in other words, their phonological and prosodic analogies focused on form instead of meaning. For example, Bruno Nettl suggested that the notes "A" and "A-flat" in a C melodic minor scale are "allophones" of the same tone (in Bright, 1963: 30). Allophones are phonemes articulated differently depending on the surrounding sounds. For instance, in the word "pit," the "p" is aspirated, but at the end of the word "stop," we barely hear the sound. Thus, these p's are allophones of /p/. Therefore, in the pit/stop example, the surrounding letters dictate the articulation of the p; likewise, the surrounding notes—whether ascending or descending—determine whether or not A or A-flat appears in a melodic minor scale.

There are several problems with this comparison. First, A and A-flat are not considered “versions” of the same note. However, within the structure of C minor, both are possible choices for note six of the scale. This analysis is both structural and

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21 Bright cites Herzog’s study of Navajo songs as well as his own work in India as examples; Kazadi wa Mukuna offers another excellent example in the music of the Congolese musician Franco (William Bright 1963: 27 and Kazadi wa Mukuna1980: 660).

22 Phonology involves mental representations of sounds, while prosody involves the contour of sounds. Nettl’s allophones in music are based on phonology, while his discussion of tonal languages and melodic contours feature prosody analyses. In linguistics, syntax refers to relationships between words themselves, while semantics focuses on meanings of these words. In ethnomusicology, by comparison, syntactical analysis might explain focus on structures in the music itself, as opposed to the assigned meanings in music.

23 Phillip Hamrick, fellow in psycholinguists at Georgetown University, 28 November 2007 (personal communication).
prescriptive. For instance, although it is often the case that in C minor, the “rules” are followed—using A when ascending and A-flat when descending, it is certainly not always the case in common use. In any event, it does not appear to be a useful music and language comparison. Although Nettl uses linguistic terminology, and despite the fact that styles of music—like languages—do have certain structures, syntax, phonology, and prosody comparisons fall short of telling us anything at all about meaning.24

Studies of musical meanings that have their roots in linguistics have been labeled with the terms "semiotic" or "semiology:" the former is the most common today (see Monelle 1992 for an overview). Milton Singer notes that researchers often use the terms interchangeably (1985: 550); however, he emphasizes their differences. For example, Saussure’s semiotics focused on the signifier and the signified, while Charles Peirce’s semiology had three elements: the sign, the object, and the interpretant or semiosis. While Saussure is known for his theories on the nature of signs, and his influence on structuralist approaches in the humanities, Peirce is best known for his three types of signs: icon, index, and symbol. An icon is a sign in which the signifier resembles its object (the signified), an index is a sign related to its object through reference or co-occurrence, and a symbol is when a sign and object are related through the use of linguistic designation and are not iconic or indexical. Peirce also described semiosis as having three elements: what Saussure would call signifier, the object/signified (abstract or concrete), and finally the interpretant, or the effect created by bringing the sign and object together in the mind of the perceiver (Buchler 1959:99).

24 Such analyses are in line with Generative Grammar (see Noam Chomsky, Aspects of the Theory of Syntax, Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1965). However, newer theoretical paradigms in linguistics—such as those of Vyvyan Evans—do focus on meaning-construction, and as such are more relevant to this dissertation.
In 1990, Jean-Jacques Nattiez drew on the work of both Saussure and Peirce in presenting what he called “music semiology.”\(^{25}\) In this work, he explains musical meaning in three parts: the music itself, the processes of composition and performance, and the perception of the listener. Nattiez later (2003) wrote that: “Meaning exists when perception of an object/event brings something to mind other than the object/event itself. Implicit in this view is the notion that language should not be taken as the model of signification in general” (Nattiez in Patel 2008: 304). Although I am not drawing directly on Nattiez’s work, his definition of meaning as relying on indexical signs (associations or references in the mind), and his implication that meaning (significance) is not limited to language, are both in line with my own assertions. Nattiez’s focus was on analyses of European classical music, using Saussure's definition of "sign" as well as Peirce's concept of infinite semiosis or layers of meaning. Like Nattiez, Victor Kofi Agawu also applied semiotics to European classical music in his *Playing With Signs* (1991), when he wrote about tonal structures in European classical music.

While these earlier comparisons between music and language relied primarily on structuralist-based semiotics, this dissertation focuses on newer theories and terms from cognitive linguistics, most notably those of Vyvyan Evans. Importantly, these cognitive theories do not refute basic elements of the older models—such as the presence of binary oppositions—but instead, they enhance our understanding of how meaning is made. In other words, they provide a more thorough explanation of constructs put forth by Saussure, Peirce, and Lévi-Strauss. For example, a category like “pregnant” has an all-

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or-nothing, binary structure: one is either pregnant or not pregnant. However, cognitive abilities allow for the construal of pregnancy in degrees. For example, one may conceptualize a woman near the end of her pregnancy as being “really pregnant,” thus imposing a continuum on an otherwise binary category. The present research shows that Welshness is also often perceived in degrees—one can be more Welsh than others—without negating the basic binary opposition of Welsh and not-Welsh.

It is argued here that such rich and varied categories develop through personal experience, through which concepts become linked together. Therefore, depending on personal experience of pregnancy (whether one’s own or one’s observations of others’), linked concepts might include morning sickness, shopping for baby clothes, dropping out of high school, or medical emergencies. In the case of Welshness, associating particular signs—e.g., choral singing, poetry, and regional affiliation—with being Welsh allows for the assessment that an individual with more of these signs, or at least, with the most important ones, will be in a sense “more” Welsh than another.  

As shown here, newer theories of cognition complement earlier studies of meaning construction. What I do borrow directly from older theories is Peirce’s broad definition of a sign, following Turino’s assertion of music’s indexical nature.

26 The teenagers in this research did not generally view Welshness in degrees, which I attribute to—among other things—their age and consequently less complex cognitive models of Welshness. See Chapters III, IV, and VII for further discussion.

27 Turino suggests that the broad Peircian model is more appropriate for music than one based on Saussure (1999: 222). Similarly, in sociology, Phillip Vannini suggests a Peircian-based model as being more appropriate to cultural studies than the popular Saussure-inspired models (2007: 113-117). Saussure is not directly relevant in part because newer research shows that there is more to meaning than some of what he proposed. While such theories are not in conflict with Saussure’s, they do enhance them, and thus broaden our understanding of human meaning making. For example, the concept “bachelor” consists of the following features: male (as opposed to female), single (as opposed to married), and adult (as opposed to child) (Evans and Green 2006: 249-258). While this provides a useful feature description of bachelor—using binary features/paired opposites—it also over-generates members. For instance, with the above featural description, the Pope, George Clooney, and the Dalai Lama become members of the category
Vyvyan Evan’s work is particularly relevant since the work presented here is concerned with signs associated with Welshness, including—but not limited to—particular songs and musical activities. To say that these signs are associated with Welshness means that accessing any of them most likely prompts for the activation of the “feeling” of Welshness. For example, when the national anthem of Wales is heard or sung, a model is accessed, and it activates other knowledge and memories related to it. These may include recognition of the tune and who wrote it, as well as specific memories of hearing it/singing it.

To begin, it should be noted than Vyvyan Evans’ constructs are intended to account for linguistic phenomena, not music. However, although music does not provide access to precise meanings the same way language does, music still does evoke meaningful responses. Moreover, as Patel argues, music can be investigated in ways similar to language, since there are similar brain mechanisms involved in making music

“bachelor.” With merely a featural description, all three are equally good members of the category “bachelor”: they all equally share the three crucial features of bachelorhood. However, this is almost certainly not the case in the mind. Psychological research has shown that in addition to features (a la Saussure), people have knowledge of category prototypes. Prototype theory stipulates that some members of a category are better examples than others, and that prototypes for a given category will vary for social, cognitive, and environmental reasons (Eleanor Rosch 1975). Thus, meaning construction and representation go beyond the paired opposite/binary feature description originally proposed by Saussure’s theories. In the case of the present research, this explains how an individual can perceive one as being more Welsh than another. Peirce’s model is used here, but only in part: music is primarily indexical and occasionally iconic (cf. Cross 2008, 2012, Turino 1999). These terms, along with Peirce’s emphasis on the process of semiosis, are relevant to this dissertation. However, other aspects of Peirce’s theories are not directly applicable, just as those of Saussure and Lévi-Strauss are not used extensively.

28 Evans’ theoretical constructs outside of those mentioned here are beyond the scope of this dissertation. The ones I use in this section are useful in shedding light on cultural identity. I am indebted to Phillip Hamrick (personal communication) for his insights on this discussion. Aniruddh D. Patel highlights some obvious differences between music and language when he notes how one can translate languages and mostly keep meaning intact. He contrasts this with playing Beethoven on a gamelan: it does not convey any particular meaning, and certainly the same meanings will not be created by listeners from Vienna and listeners from Java (2008: 302). This is because language works in part by providing access to specific, socially-agreed-upon meanings. However, as cognitive linguists stress, even meanings in language are dependent upon personal experiences (cf. Laura Bohannan 1966).
and language possible. Crucial to such investigation is the human capacity to form categories from sequences of sound, extract statistical regularities from rhythmic and melodic sequences (cf. Creel, Newport, and Aslin 2004), integrate incoming sounds into hierarchical structures, and extract nuanced emotional meanings from acoustic signals (Patel 2008: 4).

Cognitive linguists emphasize that language is best understood as being shaped by general cognitive capacities. Following this view, it should come as no surprise that language and music are somewhat similar. Evans recognizes that language provides access not only to linguistic knowledge, but also to non-linguistic knowledge. He calls rich, complex non-linguistic knowledge “encyclopaedic knowledge” (2007: 72); this is also known as conceptual knowledge (see Moss et al. 2007). This non-linguistic knowledge includes abstract knowledge—*Cardiff is the capital of Wales*, autobiographical or “episodic” memories—*the first thing you did when you went to Cardiff on vacation*, and feelings on the fringe of consciousness that are difficult to put into words; these are all things known to be related to both music and cultural identity.

There are various theoretical constructs that describe the organization of this knowledge. Two of the most widely used terms are frame and cognitive model. A frame is “a schematisation of experience (a knowledge structure), which is represented at the conceptual level and held in long-term memory and which relates elements and entities with a particular culturally embedded scene, situation or event from experience” (Evans 2007: 85). Salvatore Attardo describes frame as a structured body of knowledge about something (1999: 51). This knowledge is stored in memory and meaning is relativized to it. For example, understanding the meaning of “restaurant” entails activating knowledge
about food, waiters, different meals, paying bills, leaving tips, and specific experiences of particular restaurants. Thus, frames are bodies of related information with an emphasis on things and the relationships between them. If the subjective experience of Welshness is called a frame, then it implies an emphasis on individual signs of Welshness and the relationships between them as they have been experienced in day-to-day life.

It is also possible to conceptualize the subjective concept or perception of Welshness as a cognitive model. Cognitive models are structured, large-scale, abstract bodies of related knowledge (Evans 2007: 23). They are made up of both abstract knowledge and autobiographical memories and connections between them. Cognitive models can be systematically accessed by language, but they can be accessed without language, too (cf. Feinberg and Genz 2012). As such, casting Welshness as a kind of cognitive model implies that Welshness is an abstraction that “emerges” from a body of knowledge largely dependent on personal experiences.

Important to this dissertation is Evans’ description of how cognitive models work “at varying levels of detail.” Cognitive models can be changed through experience. This dissertation argues that cultural identity relies on a body of knowledge that has been dynamically shaped and reshaped by experience, but that nevertheless appears to be stable. Therefore, Welshness is comprised of a body of interconnected knowledge, and what I have called “signs” of Welshness provide access points to the feeling of

29 Abstract factual knowledge provides access to autobiographical memories, and vice versa.

30 The emphasis on individual cognitive processes should be stressed; that is, the centrality of an individual’s personal experience/memories in the making of meaning is being emphasized here. Cf. Matthew Lauer and Shankar Aswani, “Indigenous Ecological Knowledge as Situated Practices: Understanding Fishers’ Knowledge in the Western Solomon Islands,” American Anthropologist, Volume 111, No. 3 (September 2009): p. 318. Despite this, it is the sense of other people having some of the same central signs in their models—in other words, shared signs—that gives people the impression of group membership.
Welshness, which gives rise to rich layers of meaningfulness. As such, cultural identity can be viewed as both a social phenomenon and a cognitive one (cf. D’Andrade 1995).

A growing body of literature in cognitive semantics, psycholinguistics, and cognitive science shows that meaning construction relies on a rich interplay of knowledge, including abstract and concrete meanings, experiential knowledge, prediction, embodied, and emotion.31 Thus, although they are unique phenomena, language and music are similar in their processes: both language and music serve as access points to the conceptual system, where our knowledge and experiences are stored and linked in cognitive models.

Evans’ view that much of meaning construction involves non-linguistic knowledge allows for further parallels between language and music. While music triggers cognitive models that may be strongly autobiographical, language accesses language-specific meaning, which gives it semantic precision. However, this is all in addition to autobiographical meaning that is also accessed by language. Simply put, both language and music rely heavily on the human conceptual system, where meanings are dependent upon the rich tapestry of conceptual knowledge. Evans’ work is used here for its clarity, relevance, and because it provides theoretical constructs that are psychologically plausible (see Moss et al. 2007, Vigliocco & Vinson 2007).

In sum, language and music are similar in their structure, processes, and representations; these similarities stem from the interplay of general cognitive capacities. Most importantly, both language and music prompt for meaning construction, which involves the activation of cognitive models. Welshness is not a singular, unitary concept.

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31 Moss et al 2007, Phillip Hamrick (personal communication).
Instead, it is the result of a range of interacting bodies of knowledge: linguistic, musical, autobiographical, embodied, and shared. Because personal experience is so crucial to the development of cognitive models, it is not surprising that Welsh choral singers see Welshness as being inextricably linked to choral singing: non-singing Welsh people most likely have different models of their own Welshness.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{A History of Welsh Signs}

\textit{The Welsh Language}

The complex migration and numerous conquests that characterize the long history of Great Britain make any ancient history of the Welsh language difficult to render. However, this section includes a brief overview of Medieval and Renaissance Welsh history with references to—and implications for—the language. Then, the period up through the nineteenth century—with an emphasis on the nineteenth century itself—is examined, not only because of this period’s importance to the choral tradition in Wales, but also because of the significance of sociohistorical events during this time that led to the decline of Welsh language-use across Wales. Finally, I turn to the twentieth century,

\textsuperscript{32} I cannot comment on non-singing Welsh people, as all interview and survey participants were choral singers. However, Chapter VII includes data from 15 surveys conducted in 2011 among non-singing Welsh-Americans, and these also suggest a connection between Welshness and musicality, particularly singing. It should also be noted that nearly all participants in Northwest Wales are native Welsh speakers. As such, research on non-Welsh-speaking Welsh people may yield different signs of Welshness. It is notable that Coupland et al. found positive commitments toward the Welsh language, even from those with low competence (2006: 365-6), so it may be that even non-speakers (as in North America) or speakers with limited competence still see the language as a salient sign of Welshness. It should be noted that all of the choirs featured in Chapter III are Welsh-speaking choirs. The MVCs and the Mixed choir each had a couple non-speakers; the Youth choir was exclusively native Welsh speakers. The choirs featured in Chapter IV are similar: all were a mix of native- and non-speakers, with the former being the overwhelming majority (more details on participants’ language abilities are provided in Chapter IV).
when language loss gave way to political and social upheaval, resulting in controversial legislation to protect the language.  

Although all languages undergo constant change, today Welsh is one of the six surviving Celtic languages, in the subcategory “Brythonic,” along with Breton and Cornish (Irish, Scottish, and Manx are the other modern Celtic languages, in the subcategory “Goidelic”). Despite the Celtic-speaking peoples’ emphasis on oral tradition, Welsh literary traditions reach back to the sixth century.

Raymond Williams highlights some of the difficulties in the ethnic history—and I would add, linguistic history—of Wales, as Neolithic, Bronze Age, and later Iron Age arrivals all get lumped into the “Celtic” category, pitted against the Saxons (1985: 20-1) who arrived in the fifth century. It was the Saxons who coined the terms that would become “Welsh” and “Wales,” denoting alien or foreign people and land, respectively (Pryce 2001: 775-7, 778-9, 785; cf. Osmond 1995: 9). Wales was demarcated as a distinct territory between 778 and 796 C.E., when an eighty-mile long earthwork was built known as Offa’s Dyke (Colin H. Williams 1990: 21); this formed the border between the English King’s territory and the Welsh Kingdoms.

Following the Norman invasion of Britain, the Saxon terms mentioned above were being used increasingly throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, even by

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33 Similar revitalization programs are well documented in other parts of the world, e.g., Hawai‘i (Sam L. No‘eau Warner 2001), and among various Native American groups (Nora C. England 2003, Lizette Peter 2007).


35 Unless otherwise noted, the historical information on Saxon and Norman arrival and occupation in Britain in this section comes from the BBC: History, “British History Timeline,” http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/interactive/timelines/british/index_embed.shtml (accessed 12 June 2011).
Welsh writers. In Latin, the word “Walas” or “Wealas” replaced “Britones” and “Britannia” (Pryce 2001: 775-7). Gerald of Wales (Giraldus Cambrensis), a twelfth-century archdeacon, writer, and native Welshman, noted that this change in terminology “expressed a loss of status resulting from the Anglo-Saxon’s occupation of what became England” (Pryce 2001: 785). He also called this a “barbarous naming,” and referred to the Britons as the rightful heirs of the island (Pryce 2001: 787). The term “Cymry” (roughly “member of the same locality”), was also used to denote Wales and Welsh people in the twelfth century, and there is evidence that it also indicated Britons living outside of Wales.37

The Treaty of Worcester in 1218 asserted Welsh Prince Llywelyn the Great’s authority in Wales, and secured the dominance of Welsh as the primary language of the region.38 However, by this time Norman settlement in Wales was extensive. Norman occupation had been mainly carried out by English nobles, but also by the King himself—Henry I invaded in 1114. In Northwest Wales, Vikings continued raiding well into the 1130s. All of this turmoil was exacerbated by internal fighting among the Welsh. Then, England’s Henry III tried but failed to conquer Wales, instead signing the Treaty of

36 See the Musial Signs of Welshness section later in this chapter for more discussion of Gerald of Wales.

37 Despite these recorded instances from the twelfth century, it is unclear how early the term was used to define Wales (Pryce 2001: 778-9). Fiona Bowie summarizes these terms in her discussion of the complicated language and identity issues of modern Wales: to English-speakers, the people are foreigners (“Welsh”) while to the Welsh-speakers they are the kinsfolk (“Cymry”); the land is the land of strangers (“Wales”) to the English-speakers and the land of fellow countrymen/women (“Cymru”) to the Welsh-speakers (1993: 186). While Bowie is actually discussing modern relations and languages’ influence on identity, I use her description here to clarify these terms. It is obvious why explanations of this terminology appear often in the history of English incursions into Welsh territory: it shows the Welsh being the older Britons, as well as being perceived as the “other”—compared to the English—for over a thousand years.

Montgomery in 1267, which recognized Llywelyn the Great’s grandson, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, as the ruler of Wales.

This English recognition of Welsh sovereignty was short-lived, however. In 1277, Edward I invaded Wales. He began to build his famous ring of castles as a sign of his power over the Welsh. In 1282, he defeated Welsh leaders (including Llywelyn ap Gruffudd) and annexed Wales. While many Welsh revolted against King Edward I and his successor-son, others accepted English law and language to further their own political and social positions.

Ian Bremner suggests that a period of Welsh nationalism followed the conquest, including the last of the major failed rebellions in the fifteenth century. During this time, Renaissance Welsh scholars sought to align the Welsh language with classical and biblical sources, even suggesting that it was the “language of heaven.” Some also emphasized a druidic past for Wales, in an effort to emphasize the ancient British roots of the culture, including the language. They also attempted to “re-activate” the language so as to de-marginalize it (Juliette Wood 1997: 96-7).

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39 The Welsh princes had remained vassals of the English kings throughout the Middle Ages, but Llywelyn ap Gruffudd five times refused a summons to pay public homage to King Edward; he also tried to marry the daughter of one of Edward’s enemies. Two years later, Edward led the largest army seen in England since 1066 into Wales. Ian Bremner, “Wales: English Conquest of Wales c.1200 – 1415,” BBC: History, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/middle_ages/wales_conquest_01.shtml (accessed 12 June 2011). Remnants of several of Edward I’s castles stand to the present; many, including Conwy, Caernarfon, and Beaumaris, are tourist attractions in Northwest Wales.


42 Ibid.

43 This idea of using antiquity—realistic or feigned—to validate or imply depth in a cultural sign is discussed elsewhere in this dissertation.
In 1536, the English Parliament passed what would later be called the Welsh “Act of Union” or the “Laws in Wales Act—1535,” which essentially introduced English legal control to the whole of Wales, officially incorporating the latter into England. The preamble of the Act claimed that Wales was already “incorporated, annexed, united and subiecte to and under the imperiale Crown of this Realme as a very member…of the same.”  

Most importantly for the present discussion, the 1535 Act proclaimed English as the official language of public offices, and actually stated Henry VIII’s intentions of unifying his subjects by eliminating distinctively Welsh customs, including the language. This Act is commonly known as a major event in the Anglicization of Wales.

Another Act concerning Welsh lands, created in 1542, and the newly established State Church also affected this process (see Colin H. Williams 1990: 21).

In the centuries that followed, migration into and out of Wales, people seeking economic mobility, and industrialization would all contribute to further Anglicization of


45 The Laws in Wales Act of 1535 states: “And also by cause that the people of the same Dominion have and do daily use a speche nothing like ne consonaunt to the naturall mother tonge used within this Realme, somme rude and ignorant people have made distinction and diversitie betwene the Kings Subjectes of this Realme and hys Subjectes of the said Dominion and Principalitie of Wales, whereby greate discorde variance debate dyvysion murmure and sedicion hath growen betwene his said subjectes; His Highnes therfore of a singuler zele love and favour that he beareth towardes his Subjectes of his said Dominion of Wales, mynding and entening to reduce them to the perfecte ORDER notice & knowlege of his lawes of this his Realme, and utterly to extirpe [from French “eradicate,” Google Translate] all and singuler the senister usages and customes difereringe frome the same, and to bringe his said Subjectes of this his Realme and of his said Dominion of Wales to an amicable concorde and unitie…” UK National Archives, “Laws in Wales Act 1535 (repealed 21.12.1993),” http://www.legislation.gov.uk/aep/Hen8/27/26/section/wrapper1/1991-02-01?timeline=true (accessed 13 June 2011). See also John Davies, “Wales Under the Tudors,” BBC: History http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/wales_tudors_01.shtml (accessed 13 June 2011). The Welsh Language Act of 1993 repealed the 1535 Act. UK National Archives, “Welsh Language Act 1993,” http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1993/38 (accessed 13 June 2011). The more recent history of Welsh language legislation appears in the following section.

46 Williams suggests that the 1588 translation of the Bible into Welsh accelerated the acceptance of the Church of England, and thus, furthered Anglicization (1990: 21). Like the 1535 Act, the Laws in Wales Act of 1542 was also repealed in the 1990s (http://www.legislation.gov.uk/aep/Hen8/34-35/26/1991-02-01?timeline=true).
Wales and the loss of Welsh language speakers. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the industrial revolution spawned the immense Welsh coal industry, workers from all over Wales migrated to the southern valleys. This first wave of workers brought with them their Welsh language. Various factors seemed to ensure the strength of the Welsh language in Wales, including the creation of the Welsh-language Bible (1588) and a subsequent increase in literacy and the standardization of the language (see Chambers and Thompson 2005: 339). A surge of music and musical activities in Welsh appeared with the Industrial Revolution: these included new repertoire with a new notation system, the establishment of choirs, the standardization of a national music festival, and popular hymn-singing meetings.

However, education changed drastically in Wales in the nineteenth century. The British government wanted to standardize education, and their concern sparked an inquiry into Welsh schools. In a now-infamous report called the “Treachery (or Treason) of the Blue Books” of 1847 (government reports had blue covers), English commissioners berated the moral character of Welsh people, and Welsh women in particular (Beddoe 1986: 230-1, 234 and Kreider 2002: 25). They also blamed the Welsh language for holding back educational progress in Wales. While speaking Welsh in school was not technically against the law, convention dictated that English was the island’s official language—based on the old Laws in Wales Act of 1535—and therefore only English was

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48 See the section Musical Signs of Welshness below for details.

allowed in school. There is evidence that many schools actually punished students for using their native language. Educational reform acts in 1870 and 1889 re-enforced English as the only language of education (Colin H. Williams 1990: 35).

Educational reforms in nineteenth-century Wales produced mixed results for the fate of the language. On one hand, many children were encouraged to abandon Welsh in the hopes of success at school and beyond. On the other hand, feelings of defensiveness against the blatant English derision described above, coupled with concern over language-loss by the imposition of the English language, helped to fuel Welsh nationalism in the latter half of the century (cf. Prys Morgan 1986: 35, Colin H. Williams 1990: 29, 31).

Although the population doubled between 1750 and 1850, the proportion of Welsh speakers decreased from about 80% in 1801 to about 67% in 1851 (Davies 1993:36-7 in Deuchar 2005: 621). Continued industrialization in the twentieth century would worsen the situation, bringing workers from England and elsewhere to Wales. In fact, the immigration rate of South Wales at the start of the century was second only to the US: 129,000 immigrants (many from England) arrived in South Wales between 1901-1911; this is a rate of 4.5 per 1,000 people, versus 6.3 per 1,000 in America (Osmond 1985: xxix, cf. Colin H. Williams 1990: 29). There was a general increase in English language use, particularly in these industrialized South Wales valleys. In fact, people who spoke Welsh instead of English in these areas were viewed as backward and were often ostracized (Mari A. Williams 2000: 169). By the 1920s, some were fighting for

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Welsh-medium education as the solution to the obvious language decline, but young people saw English as the language of prosperity (Mari A. Williams 2000: 169-170, Colin H. Williams 1990: 36).

The war years meant big changes for Welsh life, and for the Welsh language. Two-thirds of Wales’ male population enlisted in the British army in WWI. The Second World War caused men to move away from communities, and women to take jobs in munitions factories. There was also an increasing number of immigrants: 33,000 women and children moved to the Rhondda Valley—the center of the Welsh coal industry in South Wales—during this time, and very few Welsh-language activities were maintained (Mari A. Williams 2000: 178). The end of the war brought economic depression: the Welsh unemployment rate was 38% in 1932, resulting in mass emigration—450,000 left between 1921 and 1939 (Osmond 1985: xxix-xxx).

The number of Welsh speakers declined drastically, by 21.4% from 1931-1951, with monoglot speakers declining 58% (Colin A. Williams 1990: 39). By 1951, only 28.9% of the population spoke Welsh (Jenkins and Williams 2000: 13). The Welsh Nationalist Party (Plaid Cymru), founded in 1925 and focusing on language preservation, and the Education Act of 1944, which assured parents’ rights to Welsh-medium education for their children, struggled to slow this process.\(^{51}\) The National Eisteddfod also enforced an “All-Welsh Rule” in 1950—allowing only Welsh language activities.\(^{52}\)

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\(^{52}\) The word eisteddfod (pl. eisteddfodau) comes from the Welsh eistedd (to sit, sitting) and bod (to be, being), so it is the “sitting-in” of bards (Blyn-Ladrew 1998: 239). These music and poetry competitions
Despite these efforts, the number of Welsh speakers continued to decline, down another 8.4% from 1951-1961 (Colin A. Williams 1990: 39-41). Thus, from the turn of the century to 1961, the number of Welsh speakers dropped from 50% to 26% of the population (Dylan Phillips 2000: 463). In 1962, author and one of the founders of the Welsh Nationalist Party Saunders Lewis gave his famous radio lecture *Tynged yr Iaith* (The Fate of the Language). In it, he called for Welsh people to insist that the government include Welsh on official documents (Dylan Phillips 2000: 466-7).

Lewis, called a “nationalist hero,” sparked a campaign of civil disobedience. Following his lecture, *Cymdeithas ir Iaith Gymraeg* (The Welsh Language Society) was created, seeking official status for the Welsh language. Protesters staged marches, but were held in Wales as far back as the Middle Ages, though they were not standardized until many centuries later (see the subsequent sections for more details). The National Eisteddfod is a national version of these popular regional events, and has been held each year since 1880, except for 1914 and 1940 (National Eisteddfod website). In 1937, a new constitution formally established Welsh as the official language of the eisteddfod, but it wasn’t until 1950 that the present-day All-Welsh Rule was actively enforced (Kimberly Bernard 2003: 34, 36, cf. Trosset 1993: 20). In fact, in wartime eisteddfodau, an English monarch (the then Princess Elizabeth) was even inducted into the *Gorsedd of the Bards* (Bernard 2003: 42). The *Gorsedd* is a highly-respected “society of poets, writers, musicians, artists and individuals who have made a notable contribution to the nation, its language and culture,” http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/gorsedd/introduction/, see below for further discussion of its history. This quickly changed after the war, when language-advocacy was rekindled—the National Eisteddfod Council stated in 1946: “Remember always that the National Eisteddfod is an institution for safeguarding the Welsh language and the promotion of Welsh culture” (Bernard 2003: 42). Sarah Hill also suggests the function of the festival is to protect the language (2007: 5). The National Eisteddfod clearly continues to be a Welsh cultural sign, and though it retains its All-Welsh Rule, promoters stress its inclusiveness (the official website is in both English and Welsh, and non-Welsh-speakers are encouraged to attend). While the National Eisteddfod is exclusively Welsh-language (since 1950) and changes locations annually—alternating between North and South Wales, a second eisteddfod was established after WWII (1947) to promote friendly competition among various nations: The International Eisteddfod is not limited to the Welsh language and it is held annually in Llangollen (“Eisteddfod,” in *National Library of Wales* online, http://canmlwyddiant.llgc.org.uk, accessed 3 October 08). Regional eisteddfodau are also still held throughout the year all over Wales.

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53 Lewis, a professor, was already famous for his 1936 arson (along with D.J. Williams and Lewis Valentine) at Penyberth, Llŷn Peninsula, to protest a Royal Air Force training camp for bombers on the site. Lewis explained to the courts that the arsonists had no malicious intent, but instead hoped to further the cause of the language struggle. The three immediately confessed, spent nine months in jail, and became known as martyrs for the cause. “Events 1957-1966: Saunders Lewis, Penyberth,” *National Library of Wales Online*, http://canmlwyddiant.llgc.org.uk/en/XCM1957/events/1.html (accessed 30 September 2008 and 14 June 2011). Sarah Hill also describes Lewis as having started a revolution with this lecture (2007: 6-7).
also refused to pay fines and answer summons because of the exclusive use of English in official contexts (Dylan Phillips 2000: 468-472). The Welsh Language Act was passed in 1967, but the language still held an inferior status. A campaign against English-only road signs was launched, in which signs were destroyed or torn down (Phillips 2000: 473).

In 1969, the Welsh Language Society’s chairman was musician Dafydd Iwan, who composed protest songs—including one about the road signs—that brought the campaign into pop culture and attracted many young Welsh people (Phillips 2000: 473-4). The Society aimed to change more than just the status of the language, evidenced by their various other campaigns: one was against the investiture of the Prince of Wales, another supported saving a Welsh valley from destruction by a proposed reservoir, and still another was in support of a primary school being closed. In 1972, they published their Manifesto, suggesting that saving the language was just one part of their goals (Phillips 2000: 475-7). These goals stretched into media in Wales, where they wanted dedicated Welsh-language radio and television stations. This campaign involved protesters occupying studios, blocking roads, and refusing to pay television license fees (Phillips 2000: 478-9). It was ultimately successful: a Welsh-language radio station

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55 The language activists succeeded in getting Welsh onto road signs. In North Wales, signs include Welsh first with English translations underneath. According to the BBC’s website, in South Wales this language placement is the opposite (English, then Welsh). http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/livinginwales/sites/howdoisay/roadsigns/ (accessed 14 June 2011).

56 All dwellings with a television in the UK are charged an annual fee. The current fee is £145.50 per year. TV Licensing, http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/ (accessed 22 October 2011).
(Radio Cymru) was founded in 1977, and a Welsh-language television station (Sianel Pedwar Cymru or S4C) was founded in 1982.\(^{57}\)

During the 1980s, many English people migrated to Wales’ Welsh-speaking communities. Acts of arson were committed on English-owned homes and businesses,\(^ {58}\) while on a less violent level, there were local confrontations concerning housing, schooling, and the use of the Welsh language. Some saw this wave of English migration as part of a long succession of English colonial incursions against Wales and Welshness (Day 2002: 221). In 1988, the Welsh National Party argued for planning controls to improve economic conditions for the rural Welsh-speaking population. This was manifested in Welsh-speaking areas’ measures to restrict availability of holiday homes and of housing for non-locals. There were also measures to encourage new residents to learn and use the Welsh language (Day 2002: 227).

That same year (1988), the Education Reform Act was passed, making the study of Welsh compulsory—either as a first or second language—in primary and secondary schools in Wales (Jenkins and Williams 2000: 17). In 1993, the Welsh Language Act was passed, and Bwrdd Yr Iaith Gymraeg (The Welsh Language Board) established to promote the language and ensure equality of Welsh and English (Day 2002: 216).


\(^{58}\) One of the English families I knew who had migrated to rural Anglesey in Northwest Wales told stories of arson threats they received, though luckily the acts were never committed in their particular case. They were quick to add that other than a few situations like this, their life in Wales had been pleasant and peaceful, and “99% of Welsh people” had been kind and welcoming to them.
In 1997, Wales achieved a devolved government, meaning some powers were transferred from the UK Parliament to the National Assembly for Wales.\(^59\) For the first time, Welsh Ministers could make policies and regulations that differed from the rest of the UK. The group’s legislative powers grew through the Government of Wales Act—2006.\(^60\) Support for the Welsh language is listed as one of their many achievements, broken down into the following specific issues: they supported the development of a new Welsh Language News Service, improved access to Welsh Medium Education, and they are “working towards creating a bilingual Wales.”\(^61\)

Most recently, Welsh was finally made an official language of Wales through the Welsh Language Measure—2011.\(^62\) In addition to this notable label, the measure—which now becomes law—also creates several new government bodies dedicated to protecting the language, by enforcing rights of speakers, advising the government in language matters, and improving the availability of services in Welsh.

In sum, the Welsh language steadily declined throughout the twentieth century, with the first evidence of recovery in the 2001 census, which showed that 21% of the

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population speaks Welsh. As shown in the chart below, this is up in both raw numbers and percentages from 1991.\textsuperscript{63}

Figure 2. Welsh speakers in both raw numbers and in percentage of the population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Welsh Speakers</th>
<th>Percentage of the Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>930,000</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>909,000</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>714,686</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>19% (18.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>508,098</td>
<td>19% (18.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>575,604</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Margaret Deuchar cautions that regional variation skews the data: the increase was concentrated in southeast Wales, while rural areas actually witnessed a decrease (2005:

\textsuperscript{63} The Welsh Language Society lists the 2001 number as 20.8\%. Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg/The Welsh Language Society, http://cymdeithas.org/2004/05/31/what_is_cymdeithas_yr_iainth.html (accessed 14 June 2011). The data in this section are taken from Margaret Deuchar, “Minority Language Survival in Northwest Wales: An Introduction,” ISB4: Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism, ed. James Cohen, Kara T. McAlister, Kellie Rolstad, and Jeff MacSwan (Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press, 2005): 623, rounded to whole numbers (Deuchar lists all whole numbers except for the data in 1991, which she lists as 18.6\%). The exceptions are the data for 1951, which Deuchar did not include; these numbers are from Jenkins and Williams 2000: 13, and the more specific percentage for 1981—which Deuchar did not include; she listed 19\%—I took from Colin A. Williams (1990: 39). Aitchison and Carter list a slighter higher number for 1981 (503, 549). They also suggest that statistical biases make the years 1981-1991 seem more positive than they really are, claiming that if the 1991 census information was calculated on the base used in 1981, it would actually show a bigger decrease (to 496, 530 speakers) in 1991 (2000: 33, cf. Nikolas Coupland et al. 2006: 353).

Nevertheless, Gwynedd County was consistently the county with the highest percentage of Welsh speakers from 1921-1981; in the Bangor area, the percentage was as high as 80-90% (Colin A. Williams 1990: 39-43). This is in sharp contrast to counties elsewhere in Wales: compare the total of 63% of the population being Welsh speakers in Gwynedd County in 1981, to just 2.5% in Gwent County in South Wales (Balsom 1985: 3). Aitchison and Carter identify five zones in Wales that in 1981 had nearly 70% of their populations being Welsh speakers (in Day 2002: 215).

Graham Day suggests that the minority Welsh speakers in South Wales are over-represented in high-status positions, possibly indicating that Welsh speakers are moving south to the cities for these opportunities (2002: 225). His suggestion would explain the increase in South Wales, as well as the losses in Northwest Wales, which historically has been the predominantly Welsh-speaking area. I would add to this that more people in South Wales might be understandably interested in learning Welsh, if for no other reason than the increased opportunities for Welsh speakers following the legislation of the past few decades. However, Welsh language proficiency is also quite likely being sought after in South Wales as part of building personal identities, as the language grows in prominence in the social and political landscape of Wales. Whatever the reasons for the current trends in language use across Wales, the present geographical imbalance is

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64 The Welsh Language Society also warns that the increase is deceiving because of language loss in rural, historically Welsh-speaking areas. Cymdeithas ir Iaith Gymraeg/The Welsh Language Society, http://cymdeithas.org/2004/05/31/what_is_cymdeithas_yr_iathi.html (accessed 14 June 2011). Such rural areas would include the Northwest, of particular interest in this dissertation.
nothing new. It remains clear that Welsh speakers are not evenly distributed around the country.

Finally, despite victories by Welsh-language advocates, the language struggle of the previous century has not ended in Wales. It is true that legislation over the past several decades has created a need for Welsh-speaking workers, making the ability to speak Welsh an economical—as well as a personal—advantage. However, Welsh is still a minority language and considered to be in danger of extinction (cf. Jenkins and Williams 2000: 23-15). Only 56% of Welsh speakers claimed Welsh as their first language in 1992, and one-third of Welsh children acquire the language outside the home; only 1.6% of higher education students pursue Welsh-medium courses in Welsh universities (Jenkins and Williams 2000: 24).

Several personal experiences since I began this dissertation have supported the notion that the language struggle continues in Wales. The first was at a conference in Nottingham, in which I presented some of the preliminary findings of my fieldwork (6 June 2009). My claim that the teenagers I interviewed demonstrated a very inclusive Welshness was met with strong skepticism from an English university student, who argued that his impression of young Welsh people today was one of militant nationalism, “with their road signs and everything.”

The second and most striking to me occurred at a concert of one of the choirs featured in this dissertation (Cor Glanaethwy, 29 June 2009). At the start of the second half of the show, the choir’s director Cefin Roberts explained to the audience that during intermission, some people had approached him and said that they felt he was using “too much Welsh” in his introductions—he explained each selection first in Welsh, then in
English. At this, several members of the audience applauded and shouted “yes!” in agreement, which was then drowned out by an overwhelming “booing” from the obviously appalled majority. Roberts responded by reminding the crowd that he was trying to include everyone by using bilingual explanations. He also noted the fact that Glanaethwy was, after all, comprised exclusively of first language Welsh speakers, adding that when they travel abroad to sing, announcements are conducted in the language of that country (e.g., Italian in Italy, Spanish in Spain). This was met with enthusiastic applause.

Then, during the final edits of this chapter, I was introduced to a BBC sitcom called Gavin and Stacey (BBC 2007-2009). The humor in the show is largely derived from differences between the two main characters and their respective families, one being from England and the other Wales. One of the running jokes in the series is how “no one in Wales” actually speaks the language (the show takes place in South Wales). This example of Welsh language awareness in the UK is a reminder of how regional Welsh language use is in Wales. My own experiences were exclusively in Northwest Wales, and were completely the opposite of those portrayed in this show. Obviously, being

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65 In one episode, one of the English characters visits Wales for the first time, and to prepare, he learns some Welsh phrases in honor of his Welsh hosts. When he starts speaking Welsh, and the mother of the Welsh family tells him she does not speak the language, his English friends ask him what he is doing. He responds: “I’m learning Welsh! I did an intensive course ‘cause I knew we were coming down. I wanted to know what everyone was saying…” At this, the group of English boys scoff and laugh. One of them says: “No one speaks Welsh!” The Welsh mother tries to explain better, but the previous speaker tells her to not over-complicate the matter. He tells his friend: “No one here, or where we’re going tonight [Cardiff], none of ’em speak Welsh.” “What about the signs and everything?” the boy asks. Another friend interjects: “I know, you’ve just got to ignore it.” In another episode, the Welsh family fears the “Welshies,” nationalists that yell at them in Welsh when they visit a caravan (recreational vehicle) park; in still others, one mysterious character speaks only Welsh, even though no one around him understands. They view him with suspicion. Analyzing the intent of the writers of this show is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I cannot make any claims suggesting that the show intends to be demeaning to Welsh people. On the contrary, one of the co-writers/creators is Welsh, and a couple of the best characters on the show are Welsh; I find it to be funny. However, I also recognize that I am outside of these issues. I have not heard what any of my Welsh friends think of the show.
bilingual, the Welsh speakers spoke English to me. However, I heard Welsh all the time—on buses and trains, in shops and pubs. The first language of the singers featured in this dissertation is a minority language, but it is highly concentrated in their local area. They are surrounded by the Welsh language, particularly the young—and therefore less mobile—singers, many of whom attend Welsh-medium school and Welsh-medium choir practice, in addition to their Welsh-medium home life.

Therefore, the Welsh language is an important cultural sign, especially in the part of Wales in which this work is concentrated. Carol Trosset writes about asking someone in Wales if she spoke Welsh, and the women replied: “Oh yes, I am Welsh” (1993: 22). I heard the exact same response on a bus in Northwest Wales in 2008. Even though I argue throughout this dissertation that language is not the only sign of Welshness, nor is it a necessary sign as some suggest (see Victor Horboken 2004: 205, Meic Llwellyn 2000: 337), it is obvious that language is an important marker of Welshness for many. Anthony Coxon emphasizes the importance of the language sign in Wales by highlighting the differences between Wales and Scotland with regards to their minority Celtic languages (Welsh and Scottish-Gaelic, respectively). He noted, as of 1978: “in Skye, the heartland of Gaelic, there is still political controversy about whether signposts should

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66 I studied Welsh at a free, beginners’ course in Llandudno, Conwy County, learning a few phrases to use with the participants in this dissertation. However, it was unnecessary for me to learn Welsh fluently to conduct the research, as all participants had native fluency in English. Despite my interest in the Welsh language, it would have been unlikely for me to have achieved sufficient fluency to use the language in conducting fieldwork in merely one year (this is particularly true for my early research, which I began immediately upon arrival).

67 Teenagers in this isolated region have not had as much experience as adults presumably have had among English-dominated communities, simply because of their age. The adults have most likely spent more time outside of this region, and have lived before much of the legislation described in this chapter.
also be in Gaelic,” while even in predominantly English-speaking areas of Wales, bilingual signs are used (1978: 268).

The continued legislative measures described above are evidence of ongoing language issues in Wales. It is impossible to talk about cultural identity in Wales without a discussion about the Welsh language, for the politicizing of the language affects speakers and non-speakers alike. It has a direct impact on the Welsh identities featured in this dissertation, as the participants are primarily native Welsh speakers.

The language has been a central sign since at least the Middles Ages, and it was used in the nineteenth century as part of intense nationalism. During this time, as the choral tradition was also developing, Northwest Wales was in severe financial crisis: by the middle of the nineteenth century, 60% of Welsh land was controlled by just 1% of landowners (Day 2002: 141-2). As such, an idyllic, romanticized identity was renewed. Rural Wales was seen as the home of the Welsh-speaking “common folk” with their own brand of Christianity (Nonconformity), struggling against the English-speaking, landowning, Anglican class (Colin H. Williams 1990: 37, Day 2002: 141-2). Both language and religion were major components of Welshness for many.

*Religion and Welshness*

Since Welsh religious activities are so-often mentioned in references to Welsh identity, specifically with regards to music and the choral tradition in particular, religion in Wales is a particularly noteworthy sign to discuss in this dissertation. Religious

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68 See the subsequent section on religion.
revivals from the eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries resulted in an increase in chapel building, and made the Welsh chapel the center of Welsh social life. Furthermore, religious fervor in Wales during this period directly contributed to the development of the choral tradition because it provided vocal training, new repertoire, social singing opportunities, and venues for musical competition. A brief history of relevant Welsh religious developments appears below.

A Welsh language bible in 1558 bolstered Protestantism in Wales, and consequently aided in the development of a uniform version of the language and widespread literacy. The first so-called “Free” or “Independent” church was founded in Wales shortly thereafter (1639). Such churches became known as “Nonconformist,” because they did not “conform” or adhere to the doctrine and control of mainstream Anglican Protestantism (Chambers and Thompson 2005: 339, Elvet Lewis 1904: 15-16). Efforts were made to control these deserters, including laws passed limiting their rights to meet and even—for ministers—to live in, or even visit, certain locations.70 The Toleration Act, passed in 1689, granted religious freedom to the Nonconformists in Wales.71 According to C.R. Williams, the Independent churches founded in the seventeenth century were “English in character,” but in the eighteenth century, there was a massive revival—known as the “Methodist Revival”—that included preaching in Welsh


and the teaching of literacy (1952: 243). The BBC confirms this, going as far as to suggest that during the period from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, Wales earned the nickname “Land of Revivals,” with no less than fifteen major religious revivals!\(^{72}\)

According to the 1851 Census, 80% of the church-goers in Wales went to a Nonconformist chapel (Chambers and Thompson 2005: 339). During this century, Nonconformity spread with the migration of workers into industrialized areas, where new chapels were built at an astounding rate. Unconfirmed reports suggested that a chapel was built every eight days;\(^{73}\) Gareth Williams provides more specific data for South Wales, the heart of the coal mining industry. In Glamorgan County in 1851, there were 393 chapels. By 1910, there were 1,217, with 151 in the Rhondda Valley alone. In the town of Aberdare, between 1840-1870, fifty chapels were built. By 1905, there were 4,716 Nonconformist chapels in Wales, a quarter of which (1, 170) were in Glamorgan (1998: 28, 36).

These Nonconformist chapels were important institutions for the education of Welsh children (Gaynor Cohen 2007: 97). They also functioned as the center of Welsh social life, and were central to nineteenth-century Welsh identity and a growing nationalism.\(^{74}\) The biggest revival of Nonconformity (according to the BBC) happened


\(^{74}\) See Gareth Williams 1998: 28, Gaynor Cohen 2007: 92, and Sarah Hill 2007: 12, for just a few examples of authors who make these arguments. The Church of England was seen as yet another aspect of the oppression of the English, and Anglican followers were already the minority Christians in Wales. The Church of England was disestablished in 1920, becoming the Church in Wales (“Wales: Religion and
1904-1905. C.R. Williams argues that this revival’s notability comes from the fact that it was not pioneered by ministers, but instead by laypersons—both men and women, and that it helped motivate young Welsh people to attend chapels. This revival produced a new generation of politically- and socially-conscious Nonconformist leaders, who would be central in Welsh nationalist politics in the twentieth century (1952: 252, 254-5, 258, see also Chambers and Thompson 2005: 341).

It was in the midst of the Nonconformist fervor of the nineteenth century that an intense interest in religious music appeared in Wales. This had a profound impact on the birth and growth of the choral tradition. Between 1816 and 1859, over fifty hymnbooks were published, with tunes from Welsh folksongs, English hymns and secular tunes, adaptations of classical pieces, and local original compositions (Phyllis Kinney online). To demonstrate the popularity of religious choral music, consider also Ieuan Gwyllt’s revised hymnbook of 1897: by 1900, it had sold 50,000 sol-fa notation copies and 11,000 staff-notation copies (Gareth Williams 1998: 27, cf. Phyllis Kinney online). “Sol-fa” or “tonic sol-fa” is a form of notation that uses no staves and classical European notes, but instead solfege syllables to indicate pitches, and lines and dots to indicate rhythms. See the example below:


“Tonic sol-fa” (or just “sol-fa”) is the term used in all printed sources I came across in writing this dissertation, as well as by all the Welsh singers and conductors I met during my fieldwork.
Tonic sol-fa notation swept across Wales in the nineteenth century. Eleazer Roberts\textsuperscript{77} is credited with introducing this notation to Wales, but it may be that local teachers were already using this method at that time (Gareth Williams 1998: 25-6). In addition to being the favorite means of singing instruction in Welsh Sunday Schools, it was adopted at Bangor Normal College in 1864 as part of teachers’ instruction, and under the Education Act of 1870, it became the method for use in elementary schools (Gareth Williams 1998: 33). By 1894, the National Eisteddfod’s chief choral event included 1130 singers in seven choirs, 87\% of whom used sol-fa notation, with the proportion among Male Voice Choirs at 96\% (Gareth Williams 1998: 33). This style of notation developed in tandem with the choral institution in the second half of the nineteenth century.

\textsuperscript{77} Roberts was a Welsh translator for John Curwen (1862), who taught tonic sol-fa to his Sunday School, and then created a publishing house, college, and a Tonic Sol-Fa Association to promote the method. 79\% of certificates from his college between 1891-1895 were awarded to Welsh musicians (Gareth Williams 1998: 32).
century, helping to make four-part congregational vocal music prominent among the working class (see Gareth Williams 1998: 34). Thus, tonic sol-fa’s widespread popularity contributed to the growth of choral singing. It is still being used by many choral singers in Northwest Wales today.78

In addition to tonic sol-fa notation, hymn-singing festivals called cymanfaoedd canu (singular cymanfa ganu or gymanfa ganu)79 also promoted four-part singing. There is a debate as to when and where the first of these took place, either in Aberystwyth in 1830 or in Aberdare in 1859. However, what is certain is that they were regularly held in the second half of the nineteenth century, and they were popular social events. In 1896, it was estimated that nearly 1 in 8 of the population of Wales had attended one in the past year (Gareth Williams 1998: 24). Cymanfaoedd canu became the primary community events within the context of Wales’ rapid industrialization and subsequent chapel building (Gareth Williams 1998: 26). Eleven of thirteen Côr Meibion Maelgwn singers interviewed for this dissertation noted a strong chapel experience as their primary education in singing, while the other two still mentioned the chapel as part of their

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78 It is in use by some of the members of Côr Cymysg Dyffryn Conwy. Côr Meibion Maelgwn also has members who use this type of score. The latter’s librarian guessed that about 60% of the singers use sol-fa instead of staff notation. Moreover, singing a cappella using sol-fa seemed to be a prominent rehearsal tactic when Maelgwn was learning a new piece. The choir always used sol-fa to rehearse, so whether they are staff or sol-fa notation readers, they all use the method itself for singing. Maelgwn’s conductor notes a general decline in the number of men who can read notation (sol-fa notation, but even more so for staff notation), and these men have to learn their parts by ear.

79 These hymn singing events appear in various spellings due to mutations found in the Welsh language. For example, “canu” (“singing”) is modifying a feminine noun (“cymanfa” or “assembly,” plural “cymanfaoedd”) and thus the “c” in canu mutates into a “g.” Cymanfa ganu is literally “singing assembly,” although this term refers specifically to gatherings in which only hymns are sung. When speaking about a specific event, y gymanfa ganu (the hymn-singing session) is used: the “y” in front causes the “c” to mutate once again to a “g.” This is the form used by the group who stages the annual North American Festival of Wales (the Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu Association, whose festival features a hymn-singing event in Welsh). Plural forms do not mutate, so the hard “c” remains in the plural forms, whether talking about hymn-singing sessions in general (cymanfaoedd canu) or specific events (y cymanfaoedd canu). See Alun Hughes, “English Readings: the Origin of the Species ‘Gymanfa Ganu’ and Its Variants” in Cymdeithas Madog, 23 March 2000, http://www.madog.org/dysgwyr/readings/reading03.html (accessed 26 May 2009).
training. Clearly, the Welsh chapels’ ability to help create choral singers is not entirely a thing of the past. However, this may be changing as chapel attendance wanes, as evidenced by the Youth responses discussed near the end of this chapter.  

Nevertheless, Nonconformity (and Nonconformist chapels) became a notable sign of Welshness in the nineteenth century. Religious fervor during this period encouraged the rampant building of chapels, which played a central role in Welsh social life, including popular hymn-singing gatherings and choral singing experiences. Tonic sol-fa notation provided an effective way for Welsh men and women to learn to sing in harmony, and thus participate in these musical activities. Finally, chapels provided venues for eisteddfodau from the mid-nineteenth century through today (see Gareth Williams 1998: 36 and Carol Trosset 1993: 136-7).  

A category for composing a hymn tune was added to the competition, which still attracts entries to the present (Gareth Williams 1998: 64). Thus, religious and musical signs were firmly interlocked in nineteenth-century Wales, and both became increasingly salient signs of Welsh cultural identity.

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80 These two emphasized school as the source of their background in singing, but also mentioned chapel singing as another important source.


82 Sarah Hill argues that chapels even influenced the development of Welsh pop music, through “chaste” subject matter and a ban on electric instruments, long after English skiffle had gone electric and crossed over to America. Furthermore, Welsh pop groups (in 1960s and 1970s) used chapels as recording venues (2007: 55, 62).
Musical Signs of Welshness

Singers are prominent in accounts of Welsh music from long before the nineteenth-century religious revivals. The earliest of these comes from the mid-sixth century, in references to court bards. However, there is little evidence of what this pre-Norman Welsh music would have sounded like. The earliest substantial accounts come from copies of Welsh laws dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Among court officials were listed chief bards and song “declaimers.” The infamous Gerald of Wales wrote in Latin about medieval Welsh vocal music, but the details of his descriptions of singing practices and styles are often debated. What is most interesting and most relevant to this dissertation is Gerald’s suggestion that polyphonic singing is an innate—or at least, an intuitive—Welsh trait, a sentiment echoed by some of the singers interviewed for the present research. He writes: "And what is still more marvellous [sic], children too, and even infants, when first they turn from tears to song, follow the same manner of singing" (in Burstyn 1986: 162). It may be then that Welshness, being defined at least in part by a predilection for singing (with or without evidence), is an identity that is much older than the nineteenth century, when this notion accompanied nationalism across Wales. From pre-Reformation through the nineteenth century, there is detailed evidence of religious vocal music in Wales, as well as calendar customs involving door-to-door singing and poetry competitions.

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83 This brief history of Welsh music prior to the nineteenth century comes from Phyllis Kinney’s article on traditional music in Wales in *Grove/Oxford Music Online* (http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/41108) unless otherwise indicated.

84 Shai Burstyn provides an overview of his work and a strong argument in support of his credibility (1986: 155-169); cf. Gareth Williams (1998: 24-25) for an opposing view.
Despite this long—albeit under-specified—history of poetry and singing in Wales, the Welsh choral institution itself can be traced back only to the nineteenth century, when institutions like Nonconformist chapels and eisteddfodau fostered the development of choral singing in harmony. During this time, industrialization also played a key role in creating new communities needing social activities. Musical activities, such as community choirs, developed alongside of and as part of increasing nationalism through the later 1800s. Wales was not exempt from the widespread fervor that typifies this era, specifically the interest in celebrating cultural identity by inventing and reinterpreting traditions.

The Welsh eisteddfod is a fine example. According to the National Eisteddfod’s official website, eisteddfodau were first recorded as early as 1176, under Lord Rhys at Cardigan Castle (cf. Blyn-Ladrew 1998: 226). But according to Joan Rimmer, the earliest rules of eisteddfodau are from the sixteenth century, not necessarily handed down from the “ancient bards” as is often suggested (1986: 80-1).

In fact, eisteddfod practices concerning the bards did not become part of the festival until the early nineteenth century (National Eisteddfod website). The Gorseedd of the Bards is a group established in London in the late eighteenth century to promote Wales’ Celtic heritage. They conducted ceremonies that were originally promoted as ancient Druidic rites. According to Carol Trosset, this history was contested by

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86 The competitions tend to follow a complex set of formal categories concerning bards, minstrels, pedagogy, and string music criteria.
numerous Welsh scholars until eisteddfod officials finally admitted the true origin of the practice as a late eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century invention (1993: 52).

Of course this process of feigned historical continuity is not unique to Wales, nor was it exclusively a nineteenth-century phenomenon, even within Welsh culture. Joan Rimmer writes about Welsh harp traditions and so-called other musical “revivals,” a label of which she is wary. She refers to several publications of songs from the eighteenth century, one containing the claim: “Supposed by the Learned to be the Remains of the Music of the Ancient Druids” and another “Remains of those originally sung by the Bards of Wales” (1986: 77-78). However, there is no evidence that any of these songs bear any connection to druids; there are no known sources for these songs (78, 82).

It was in the 1840s and 1850s that instrumental music—including the once-popular harp—fell out of favor. It was relegated to pubs, and choral singing became the more “respectable” national symbol in the wake of religious fervor (see Prys Morgan 1986: 35). But then there was a “revival” of Welsh harp traditions, or what Blyn-Ladrew more accurately calls the “invention” of traditions now widely considered continuous and authentic (1998: 235). Puritanical religious fanaticism had caused a decline in these traditions beginning in the seventeenth century (Blyn-Ladrew 1998: 227-8, 231-2, cf. Prys Morgan 1986: 28-29), but a flourish of writers, collectors, arrangers, and performers over the next two centuries—many of them of Romani descent—renewed the practices, often giving the impression that they were retaining an ancient, unchanged tradition. For

———. The Gorsedd was first involved with the eisteddfod in Carmarthen in 1819, and has been part of the National Eisteddfod since its creation/standardization in 1861. The National Eisteddfod of Wales. “Gorsedd of the Bards,” http://www.eisteddfod.org.uk/english/content.php?nID=43 (accessed 17 September 2011).
example, harpist John Roberts, who was of Romani ancestry, excelled in *penillion*\(^{88}\) singing, and created an identity for himself of that of an ancient Welsh bard (Blyn-Ladrew 1998: 229-30, 232-3, 235). The harp he helped promote is actually of Baroque, Italian origins, though this fact was not mentioned at the time (Prys Morgan 1986: 28-29).

It is not surprising that modern people might want to claim antiquity for their cultural practices: this can serve as validation, making the signs seem unique, connected to deeper roots, and therefore, more valuable. But it is the reinterpretation—in other words, the meaning continually assigned by current participants—that creates an important cultural sign. What is noteworthy here is that in a context of widespread reinterpretation of and interest in Welsh signs, both musical and non-musical, community choral singing developed in Wales. And as discussed above, the influence of religious fervor on nineteenth century Welshness and music is immense.

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\(^{88}\) Penillion singing, or *cerdd dant*, is a recitation of Welsh poetry to harp accompaniment. *Cymdeithas Cerdd Dant Cymru* (The Welsh Cerdd Dant Society) cites several medieval manuscripts as possible early accounts of the tradition, but they also note that the first of the actual melodies in print does not appear until 1839. Therefore, how this music sounded prior to that is unclear, because the singers’ lines were improvised, and the harpists’ transmitted via oral tradition. Basically, the harpist plays a traditional melody, and the singer sings a counter-melody (*cyfalaw*). Strict attention to meter and accents between the two (voice and harp) make the practice rather complex. See Cymdeithas Cerdd Dant Cymru, 2011, http://cerdd-dant.org/english/about/ (accessed 27 January 2011). Cerdd dant is still practiced in Wales today. It is an event at the National Eisteddfod. The society above mentions one teenager, Einion Dafydd of *Glanaethwy*, as a progressive performer of the art, and singers in my local choir (*Maelgwn Male Voice Choir*) told me there was a new group of young men that had recently formed to perform penillion in the community in 2008. Because it requires Welsh-language ability, it is bound-up with ideas of language—and wider cultural—preservation in Northwest Wales.
Visual Signs of Welshness

In Wales, musical and religious signs were not the only nineteenth-century inventions/reinterpretations. Common Welsh visual signs (e.g., dress/costumes) seen in Wales today would also make their debut during this time. Like many musical traditions, they were—and are—often viewed as ancient and continuous. The so-called “national costume” for Welsh women, consisting of a tall black hat and big red cloak over a pretty petticoat, was created by Augusta Hall, known as “Lady Llanover” (1802-1896). Lady Llanover was a leader in the romantic revival of Welshness in the early- and mid-nineteenth century. She studied peasant outfits, creating and drawing what she thought a national female costume should look like (Beddoe 1986: 233). According to Beddoe, this image became popular at a time when the working peasant women’s clothing style was dying out. As such, images of nineteenth-century Welsh women always show the women standing in what was modeled after a former working-women’s outfit (1986: 233).

Similarly, Juliette Wood calls the tea towel in Welsh souvenir shops, complete with its images of this “traditional” Welsh women’s costume, “an index of cultural misinformation” (1997: 93). While I agree that people are often unaware of the actual history of cultural signs, “traditional” Welsh costumes are not unique in being labeled ancient, or being thought of as continuous. These costumes represent yet another instance of a nineteenth-century sign that is still undergoing the reinterpretation process today. The costume is still popularly displayed for tourists as traditional Welsh dress, and schoolgirls throughout Wales wear it on the country’s national holiday, St. David’s

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89 Although several sources cited in this chapter prefer to call these signs “inventions,” and I understand their intentions in doing so, I use the term “reinterpretation” for my own labeling throughout this dissertation to emphasize the process involved in inventing, maintaining, and/or otherwise recognizing signs of cultural identity.
Day\(^{90}\) (cf. Wood 1997: 93). Moreover, every souvenir shop in Northwest Wales is full of dolls dressed in this manner, and towels, mugs, magnets and the like are covered with images of Welsh girls and women wearing this costume.

Clearly, the visual signs of the nineteenth century are alive and well, and in typical reinterpretation-fashion, they exhibit changes in form and function, and are often touted as much older and continuous than they actually are (cf. Eric Hobsbawm 1983). As such, these signs are seen as carrying more depth and weight, so the process serves to legitimize them. Welsh musical signs could also be described in this way, and the nineteenth century provided the perfect context for the burgeoning nationalism that fueled the creation of these aural and visual signs. Among these signs was the choral institution, which grew alongside the newly-standardized eisteddfod, religious fervor and cymanfoedd canu (hymn-singing meetings), tonic sol-fa notation, traditional costumes, and widespread nationalism.

The Development of the Choral Institution in Wales

A nineteenth-century writer notes: “By the 1870s the Welsh were already, in no small measure thanks to Ieuan Gwyllt,\(^{91}\) a singing people; in the opinion of some, they were so to excess. In south Wales especially, it was felt, the people were ‘singing themselves stupid’” (from ‘Canu nes mynd yn goeg’, Yr Ysgol Gerddorol (Sept 1878), p.

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\(^{90}\) St. David’s Day (March 1) has been a national Welsh holiday since the eighteenth century. St. David (Dewi Sant in Welsh) was a sixth-century monk and missionary and the patron saint of Wales. “Saint David” in BBC Online: Religions, http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/saints/david_1.shtml (accessed 8 January 2011). On St. David’s Day 2009, I observed many young girls dressed in this fashion in the town of Conwy (Conwy County) in Northwest Wales.

\(^{91}\) I remind the reader that Gwyllt (1822-1877) was a composer and collector/compiler of popular hymns and other tunes.
Griffith Rhys Jones (“Caradog”), a prolific choir conductor from South Wales, famously pronounced Wales “the Land of Song” in 1877 (Williams 1998: 31). I heard this title many, many times during my year in Wales, particularly in compère’s introductions of choirs and on television, and several interviewees referred to it as well.

In 1880, the National Eisteddfod Association was formed to host an annual national event. Thus, the standardization of this popular and formerly regional cultural event coincided with the rapid growth of choral singing. Choral competition specifically became part of the National Eisteddfod in the 1860s (Gareth Williams 2001: 152). The festival’s inclusion of choral competition, not to mention the subsequent popularity of these particular events, caused an increase in the number of choirs formed. Gareth Williams notes a major shift in eisteddfodau of the 1870s, in which they changed from events emphasizing literary competition to “the more accessible, involving exciting and democratic choral concerts” (from Y Faner, 15 Oct 1873 in Williams 1998: 12).

It seems that many Welsh people saw themselves as a singing culture by the 1870s. And while there were both vocal and instrumental styles of music in Wales, there was a strong choral and collective element to Welsh music (Gareth Williams 1998: 37). As shown in this dissertation, many Welsh singers still see Welsh culture as one dominated by song, and particularly by choral singing.

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92 The term “compère” is used in the UK to describe the person who introduces the pieces in the performance; in the US it is more common to call this the “emcee” or “Master of Ceremonies.” In Wales, this was often a member of the choir who walked to the front of the group to perform these duties. I also discussed the phrase “The Land of Song” with conductor Trystan Lewis. He first pointed out to me that this was a Victorian-era designation, and that it stemmed from the abundance of chapels—with choirs singing oratorios—and towns with competing MVCs (this was part of a larger discussion on standards of singing, which is discussed further in Chapter V). Trystan Lewis, interview by author, 15 May 2009, Siop Lyfrau Lewis, digital audio, Llandudno, Conwy, Wales.
In the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, the number of both Mixed and MVCs grew rapidly (Gareth Williams 1998: 10, I found less detail on Youth or Ladies choirs). For instance, there was only one choir at the Aberystwyth eisteddfod in 1865, but there were six at Mold in 1873, and twenty-five—ten MVCs and fifteen Mixed choirs—at the Newport eisteddfod in 1897. At Carmarthen in 1867, only seven choirs competed. However, when the eisteddfod was next held there forty-four years later, there were sixty-nine choirs competing (Gareth Williams 1998: 13). Gareth Williams aptly designates 1870 until the First World War as the “Golden Age” of Welsh choralism (1998: 144-5).

I observed four distinct types of choirs in Northwest Wales in 2008-2009: MVCs, Ladies, Mixed, and Youth. Both Ladies and Mixed choirs are mentioned in accounts of singing competitions at the turn of the century (“Music in Wales” [February 1, 1900], 122). Children’s choirs are mentioned specifically in accounts of eisteddfodau of this time but little detail (e.g., repertoire) is given (see “Music in Wales” [July 1, 1899], 482 and Kalisch 1920: 624-5).

Much more information is available about the MVCs. These choirs provided entertainment and competed in music competitions. Indeed, large groups of singing miners are still stereotypes of Welsh musical life, though the tradition has outlived the mining industry in Wales. In journals such as The Musical Times and The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

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93 It should be noted that by the latter half of the nineteenth century, Welsh musical fervor was not limited to choral singing. Solo singers also increased in a similar fashion, and into the twentieth century, orchestras, opera, and various instrumental traditions also blossomed (see Gareth Williams 1998: 13).

94 I never saw a Youth choir of single-sex singers in Wales, but this is not to say there are none. In fact, one of this work’s featured interviewees, conductor Tim Rhys-Evans (of Only Men Aloud), recently began an all-boys choral program after I returned to the US (2009).
Male Voice Choirs are described as singing in various concerts and festivals, and competing in eisteddfodau (see “Music in Wales” [1901], 262). In the next chapter, I show that MVCs remain the most salient choir type. However, it is also demonstrated that choral singing of all types is a prominent sign of Welsh cultural identity.

To shed light on the popularity of choral singing today in Wales, consider the website *British Choirs on the Net* (http://www.choirs.org.uk). It lists 2,734 British choirs that have websites and/or email contact information. Choirs can be searched on this site by various criteria, including location within the UK (e.g., England, Scotland, Wales). These data are limited, because not all choirs in Wales are on this list—including some that were part of my fieldwork: the site shows only those with an online presence. This site includes mostly choir’s web pages, but some are just a short description of the choir and/or an email address for contacting the group. Still, Wales has a higher number of choirs per capita (appearing online) than either England or Scotland, and this difference is statistically significant.95

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95 The website also lists Northern Ireland (20 choirs) and the Channel Islands, Isle of Man, and Isles of Scilly (9 choirs), but these places clearly have far fewer choirs than the mainland countries I am comparing. The per capita numbers are as follows: Scotland: 0.0000247 choir/person, England: 0.0000494, Wales: 0.0000623 choir/person. The proportions of choirs in Wales, England, and Scotland are significantly different from one another ($\chi^2(2) = 16.058, p < .001$). This indicates that the proportion of choirs in Wales is significantly higher than in England or Scotland when total population size is considered. David Johnstone, engineer at the Virginia Military Institute and Phillip Hamrick, fellow in psycholinguists at Georgetown University (personal communication).
This chapter provides a brief review of recent, relevant research on identity in ethnomusicology, as well as research on Welsh music and culture. The short histories of nineteenth-century instrumental traditions, the so-called “traditional” dress, and the eisteddfod are included here to provide the wider context in which Welsh choral singing developed. Beyond this, I have shown how the standardization of the National Eisteddfod and the religious fervor that swept across Wales in the nineteenth century both coincided with and contributed to the growth of the Welsh choral institution. Finally, the brief history of the Welsh language, in musical institutions such as the eisteddfod and beyond, helps to illuminate in subsequent chapters why patterns in its salience as a sign of Welshness may be observed in the responses of the participants of this dissertation.
CHAPTER III: WELSHNESS AND CHORAL MEMBERSHIP IN NORTHWEST WALES

In the following sections, the four choir types referred to in the previous chapters are discussed: all male (Male Voice Choir or MVC), all female (Ladies), mixed-sex adult (Mixed), and mixed-sex youth (Youth). First, there is a brief history and description of each choir that participated in this research. Then, the specific responses from singers who were interviewed in 2008 and 2009 are presented. There are three primary topics that were asked of each interviewee. One, I wanted to uncover the interviewees’ reasons for joining their respective choirs, in an effort to isolate the function\(^1\) of their choral membership. Two, I tried to understand their perceptions of Welshness by isolating the signs associated with their cultural identities. Of interest also was their sense of the exclusive nature of Welshness. Shedding light on this was accomplished in part by asking them if some people or some choirs are “more Welsh” than others, and why. I also listened for associations they made between various factors and being Welsh. Finally, I asked about singers’ backgrounds and previous musical experiences, as well as their opinions about the future of the Welsh choral institution. These data are presented and discussed below. Social factors including age, sex, language, and birthplace are also considered.

\(^{1}\) In this dissertation, “function” is being used in a colloquial sense, to mean “reason for being,” “purpose,” or “impetus.” In other words, I wanted to find out why the singers joined the choir—what meaning or purpose their membership holds for them, personally.
Male Voice Choirs in Northwest Wales

It is among the MVCs in particular that a strong geographic identity emerges. For instance, one singer admitted that his former hometown is a mere thirty-minute commute, and that the choir there would probably be more fun for him, because he had old friends in that group and it was a younger choir than his current one. However, he felt that it was more important to be part of one’s own “local choir,” so he joined the one in his community.

In addition to loyalty to one’s own local area, geographic identity also takes the form of a distinction between North and South Wales (and also West and East Wales for some singers). For example, some explained that Wales gets more Anglicized as one moves east toward England. Another said that Welsh\(^2\) was “weak” in the south. It is possible that these respondents were blurring the lines between Welsh language—as just one sign—and Welshness itself. There appears to be a perception among many in this region that Northwest Wales has a unique Welshness that does not necessarily exist in other parts of the country.\(^3\) The Northwest is the underdeveloped, rural part of Wales, and many leave it to find prosperity elsewhere. Yet it is considered the heartland of the Welsh language, and it is full of old Welsh musical traditions, including cymanfoedd canu, eisteddfodau, cerdd dant, and an abundance of MVCs. I argue that because the area has so many people participating in these activities, which are so strongly representative

\(^2\) This singer was not clear as to whether he meant the Welsh language or Welsh identity. However, as discussed throughout this chapter, I asked many singers to clarify whether or not language was the primary factor in one’s Welsh identity, and most suggested that Welshness is not dependent on language abilities.

\(^3\) I presented my participants’ responses at a conference in Northwest Wales in 2009, and one woman became rather defensive, telling me that her son now lives in South Wales, and he is “as Welsh as could be.” I reassure the reader (as I did for her that evening) that this regional distinction is not my own judgment, but the opinions of the participants!
of Welsh culture for so many people, residents see the region as the “traditional” part of Wales.

But it is the Rhondda Valley in South Wales that is typically associated with the Male Voice Choir. This is not surprising given the history of the two regions. South Wales was developed and industrialized in the nineteenth century and experienced an influx of workers from other parts of Wales and from abroad. In South Wales, choirs sprung up at an astonishing rate and were fairly well documented (see Gareth Williams 1998, 2001).

However, there was also a choral tradition in North Wales. In fact, according to M.O. Jones (NLW MSS 4381B, pp. 12-13 in Gareth Williams 1998: 122): “during the decade 1840-1850, there were more congregational choirs in the populous districts of North Wales, especially Caernarfonshire, than in South Wales.” While there is evidence to confirm that many choirs did exist in North Wales in the nineteenth century, there are few written sources about them (cf. Owen 2009). It is not surprising that fewer archives were kept in the north; indeed, Owen’s oral histories reveal many stories of former choirs with little or no written documentation. Because of this gap in the research, and since my research is not focused on southern choirs, I am unable to confirm or refute the claim that there were actually more choirs in the north.

What is clear is that South Wales provided a context for both the rapid development of a choral tradition in the nineteenth century and for its notable demise in the twentieth century. New communities formed in South Wales’ mining valleys in the 1800s in a short amount of time. Consider that there were just 951 residents in the Rhondda in 1851, but twenty years later there were 16,914, and by 1911 there were
152,000 (Gareth Williams 1998: 119). This 16,000% increase in population over just sixty years consisted primarily of young men from rural North and West Wales. These were Welsh speakers and Nonconformists recently affected by the religious revival and the widespread use of tonic sol-fa notation (Gareth Williams 1998: 119). So although the tradition developed rapidly in South Wales, it was largely comprised of singers from other parts of Wales.

It should also be noted that despite the abundance of MVCs in the south, choir membership was not limited to men alone: there were Mixed choirs there as well, but men outnumbered women. For example, in the Rhondda Valley men outnumbered women 50,000 to 38,000 in 1891 (Gareth Williams 2001: 153). Moreover, women’s duties and gender roles prevented many of them from taking part in this burgeoning institution. Thus, Male Voice Choirs easily became the most salient, even stereotypical, of the Welsh choirs.

While I do not suggest the tradition belongs exclusively to either the north or the south, it does appear that many Northwest male singers feel that they are the ones who maintain the choral tradition along with other Welsh signs (e.g., language) that have been lost in many South Wales locations. Many new MVCs are forming or have formed in Northwest Wales over the past forty years. This enhances a friendly but strong sense of exclusive Welshness in this region. Welshness for many is bound up with language and choral singing; the Northwest region of Wales has both important signs in abundance.

In 2008 and 2009, I observed the performances of eight different Northwest MVCs (and several of these multiple times) as part of a summer concert series at St. John’s Methodist Church in Llandudno, Conwy (and at a few other venues). I had the
opportunity to speak with and collect surveys from members of five MVCs.⁴ One of these, Côr Meibion Maelgwn, was the local choir for my own community, and rehearsed in Llandudno Junction near my Welsh home of Deganwy (Conwy County). I learned much more of them and from them compared to the other MVCs, as I attended their performances and weekly rehearsals all year, and interviewed several members and the conductor at length.

*Côr Meibion Maelgwn* actually grew out of a group that was formed strictly for cerdd dant performance at the Llandudno Eisteddfod in 1963, and became a Male Voice Choir in 1970.⁵ But although they were formed specifically for competition in a local eisteddfod, as an MVC they did not compete, preferring instead to travel and perform (Owen 2009: 170). When Trystan Lewis agreed to take over at the helm in 2001, he insisted on auditions to clean up the choir’s sound. This included throwing out six members, including some who were founding members of the group, which he called “the hardest thing I’ve ever done.” He also made the group compete, including a competition held merely two months after he took over (in which they won first prize). They continued to compete and to win, winning the National Eisteddfod in 2005 (Owen 2009: 172). In July 2009, they again won this prestigious award.

Conversations with *Maelgwn* singers confirm Lewis’ conviction that most of the men enjoy the choir’s new competitive nature. Lewis’ intention is to keep the choir’s

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⁴ Since *Maelgwn* is the only MVC featured in this chapter, I will present the histories of these other choirs in the following chapter.

⁵ All information about *Côr Meibion Maelgwn*’s history comes from my interview with conductor Trystan Lewis (Trystan Lewis, interview by author, 15 May 2009, Siop Lyfrau Lewis, digital audio, Llandudno, Conwy, Wales) unless otherwise indicated. I also spoke with many *Maelgwn* choir members, and confirmed information in Meurig Owen 2009.
standards high through competing and singing challenging repertoire. However, like the other choirs in this research, *Maelgwn* also maintains an extensive performance schedule.

*Maelgwn* is not named for the singers’ town of residence like most MVCs, but instead for a legendary Welsh king\(^6\) who is associated with the local area. According to the choir’s description in the program for St. John’s Church concert series (2008):

“Tradition has it that Maelgwn favoured the Bards of Deganwy as opposed to the musicians of Conwy. The competing artists were obliged to swim back and forth across the River Conwy for competitive events…the Bards won because the musicians’ instruments were destroyed by the water.”

I suggest that the choice of associating the choir with this myth reveals two things: one, the choir is connecting itself to the area, specifically the land on which the community dwells—King Maelgwn is associated with the ruined castle fragments atop the Vardre, a double-hilled topographic feature of Deganwy; and two, the myth itself implies the supremacy of singing over instrumental music as a medium of music making. Perhaps the latter demonstrates a deeper assertion of the supremacy of voices to carry Welsh music, as this has historically been the most salient sign of Welshness for many. It could also be that once again, history and myth are being called upon to imply a certain depth and longevity. Moreover, this area of Wales was later famously conquered by King Edward I of England, whose remnant castle and walls—built atop an old Welsh

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monastery in the thirteenth century—still stand in the town of Conwy across the river. Therefore, this could also be a nationalistic, pre-conquest association.\(^7\)

The singers of \textit{Côr Meibion Maelgwn} participated in lengthy interviews about why they are in the choir, about their backgrounds and their thoughts on the future of the choral tradition, and about their own personal perceptions of Welshness.\(^8\) There were sixteen men interviewed, ranging in age from about mid-forties to late-eighties.\(^9\) Details from their responses appear in the subsequent section. They are set apart from the other MVCs in this dissertation so that their detailed responses may be presented. Discussions with \textit{Maelgwn} singers were much more varied than others in this dissertation, and this yielded responses of different lengths and depths. They also spent more time answering questions in their interviews than either the women or the teenagers did, so there is more descriptive data for this choir. At the end of this section, the results of the \textit{Maelgwn} interviews are summarized so that their responses may be easily compared with those of the women and teenage singers participating in similar interviews.

\footnote{7}{See “Castles of Edward I” in \textit{English Monarchs}, 2004-2005, http://www.englishmonarchs.co.uk/medieval_castles.htm (accessed 28 January 2011). The emphasis on bards over instrumentalists might also imply an emphasis on the language itself—as the medium of the bards—since it is the prosody of the Welsh language that would be the bards’ musical output. These interpretations of what the singers were intending by choosing the name “Maelgwn” are speculations on my part.}

\footnote{8}{These same issues were also discussed with adult female and mixed-sex teenage singers (from \textit{Conwy Valley Mixed Choir} and \textit{Ysgol Glanaethwy}, respectively). These results are presented in the subsequent sections of this chapter. First, I relate the results of the detailed interviews I conducted with \textit{Côr Meibion Maelgwn} 10, 17, 24 November and 1 December, 2008 in Llandudno Junction, Conwy, Wales.}

\footnote{9}{The men will remain anonymous. Many of the men are in their 60s and 70s. The exceptions in \textit{Maelgwn} are two singers in their thirties. One of these participated in an interview for this section, and the other is the conductor (Trystan Lewis, whose answers appear throughout this chapter and the next). Age as a social factor is discussed in subsequent sections.}
Functions of Choral Membership

One of the goals of this research was to find the function of the interviewees’ commitment to the choir, of how and why membership was part of their lives. This was achieved by asking specifically: “Why did you join this choir?” Often, singers would tell the story of how they got involved (e.g., a friend convinced me, I knew the conductor). Some of them did this without revealing what actually motivates them to participate, beyond their induction into the group. When this was the case, I then asked them why being in the choir was important to them.

Of the thirteen \(^{10}\) Maelgwn choir members who explained why they joined the choir, eleven indicated that some form of social interaction was the reason for their membership—answers specifically included “camaraderie,” “community,” “friends,” “brotherhood,” and “a social thing.” Clearly, choir membership serves as a domain for socializing.

\(^{10}\) Throughout this dissertation, I have kept the numbers accurate concerning specific answers to specific questions. For example, occasionally a singer would leave the interview before I could ask a question I had asked the others (the singers were attending my interviews in turns during sectional rehearsals, so often one might get called back to rehearse something and stop the interview short). Other times, singers left their interview before answering one/some of my other interview questions because we had spent so much time discussing other points more thoroughly. Therefore, the reader should not be confused by the numbers in this section: although I spoke with sixteen men in all, when I say something like “eleven out of thirteen men” said something (e.g., friendship was the reason they joined the choir), it means that only thirteen men answered that particular question. When multiple answers were noted by one individual, this is stated.
Figure 5. *Maelgwn* interviewees’ reasons for being in the choir.

| Question: Why Are You in This Choir?/Why is it Important to You to Be a Member? |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                                  | Friendship       | Musical Opportunities | Language Use |
| **Maelgwn (MVC) Responses**      | 11               | 1                  | 5*              |
| Totals (Out of 13 Singers)       |                  |                   |                 |

*One singer mentioned Welsh language use/maintenance as the function of the group, but four others (who cited friendship as their reason for being in the choir) also mentioned language use as a function of *Maelgwn MVC*.

**Perceptions of Welshness**

Beyond finding the function of the singers’ choral membership, I wanted to explore their own signs of Welshness. In my previous research, people often spoke of their cultural identity in degrees. For example, when asked how they describe themselves, some proudly said “I’m 100% Italian” or I am “full-blooded Italian,” to refer to the fact that they have no other ethnicities in their ancestry. This is a way to further delineate themselves, to mark themselves as particularly strong carriers or creators of that identity. By using these labels, they set themselves apart as distinctly prototypical Italian-Americans. When I began interviewing MVC members in Northwest Wales, this

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12 In that study, most participants called themselves “Italian,” though I made the distinction of using the more accurate “Italian-American,” since most were several generations removed from their immigrant-ancestors. Furthermore, I showed how this term was better since they were in fact all Americans, and their cultural signs were not necessarily Italian, but instead specifically Italian-American. The latter is recognized as a type of pan-southern Italian immigrant culture that developed in the US in the early twentieth century (see Richard D. Alba, *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), 77-9), and of course this culture has been reinterpreted by the present-day participants.
issue came up again unexpectedly. During the *Maelgwn* interviews, cultural identity was being described as existing to greater and lesser degrees.

After hearing a few singers describe their choir as “very Welsh” or “more Welsh than” others, I began including this topic in all future interviews. I also became interested in *why* singers would consider their group to be “more Welsh” than another. This is not easy—or perhaps even possible—to measure, since their own frames for Welshness might be so bound up with certain salient factors—language or birthplace,\(^\text{13}\) for instance—so as to make it impossible for them to consider Welshness without them. For example, thinking “most of our choir speaks Welsh” or “most of our choir was born in Wales” might lead them to claim “our choir is one of the most Welsh.” To try and understand which signs were bound up with their concepts of Welshness, I began asking them not only if some choirs or people are “more Welsh than others,” but also *why* they thought so. Singers’ reactions were quite animated and confident, and told me much about their views of Welshness.

In all, twelve of thirteen men (92%) answered “yes” to the question “Do you think some people, or some choirs, are more Welsh than others?” Two singers added to their answers the qualifier “definitely,” another “one of the most,” and yet another “no doubt.” Of these twelve singers, only two did not have an answer for “why?” The ten answers are summarized as follows: four mentioned geographical distinctions (North Wales being more Welsh than South Wales, and West more than East), four mentioned language, one

\(^{13}\) There were a couple English-born choir members in *Maelgwn* and in most of the Male Voice Choirs participating in the surveys (the north coastal area of Wales is well known as a popular retirement location for English people). There were also a couple English-born members in *Côr Cymysg Dyffryn Conwy* (Mixed) and *Côr Ieuencid Môn* (Youth), but none in *Côr Glanaethwy* (Youth).
answered both language and geography, and another both language and music. These data are discussed below.

Figure 6. *Maelgwn* interviewees’ views about the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of Welshness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions: Are Some People/Some Choirs More Welsh Than Others?</th>
<th>If “Yes,” Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Maelgwn</em> (MVC) Responses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (Out of 13 Singers)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* I am using the term “musicality” to concisely summarize signs that include music traditions, abilities, and activities, but as noted in subsequent sections, interviewees spoke of such signs exclusively with regards to choral singing in Wales. Furthermore, rather than implying that musical prowess was an exclusively Welsh trait, interviewees suggested that singing (particularly choral singing) was a “normal” part of growing up Welsh. Details from responses throughout this chapter show that this was consistent across all interview groups.

The first singer who gave one of these affirmative answers said he has “no doubt” that some choirs are more Welsh than others, but he made a point of explaining that there is still an affinity towards all Welsh people. This closeness he attributed (at least in part) to Wales being such a small country, but he was not clear about what exactly made one more Welsh than another. The second singer noted that *Maelgwn* is “one of the most Welsh” choirs, and then elaborated that their membership is “90% or more Welsh,” at least by his estimation; again, no clear reason was given. The third brought up the distinction between North and South Wales, explaining that North Wales is more Welsh.

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14 Perhaps this is a reference to choirs that have more men from England in them, but this is just speculation; he could just have easily been speaking about people with Welsh-language ability versus those without. *Maelgwn* conducts all rehearsals entirely in Welsh, and this language use is a point of pride for many *Maelgwn* singers.
The fourth interviewee was the only one who did not subscribe to this exclusive notion of Welshness. He looked rather doubtful and skeptical when I asked him the question: “do you think some people or some choirs are more Welsh than others?” He answered:

“hmmm, I wouldn’t say that. If they sing or talk in English, no matter, it’s not important.”

There are several ways of interpreting his inclusivity and his explanation. First of all, he made it clear that for him, language is not the defining factor in somebody’s Welshness, while still recognizing that it could be used by some to judge. Second, I got to know him better through subsequent rehearsals, and learned that he was a native Welsh speaker until the age of six, but spoke only English from then until he was much older. Even though his Welsh language ability is adequate enough to speak with the other native speakers in the choir, he mentioned that he does not think his Welsh is quite up to par.15 I am speculating that because he does not see his own language ability as adequate, maybe he is wary of labeling people more or less Welsh;16 after all, he brought up the language

15 This could also be attributed to the fact that he attends language classes recreationally (with his wife, who is learning Welsh for the first time; she was originally from eastern Wales). In the class, he often feels that “his” Welsh is somehow overly colloquial, since he uses Welsh remembered from his childhood, while his instructor and classmates expect what he calls “proper” Welsh. Also, I encountered him speaking Welsh in other social situations (including to strangers, so it was not just his fellow choir members) and there did not seem to be any problems with him communicating in Welsh.

16 Monika Schmid (2011) found that identity and attitude toward the community (old and new, she was looking at migrants) affects retention or attrition (loss) of one’s first language (Monika Schmid, “Language Attrition and Identity,” Culture and Neural Frames of Cognition and Communication, ed. S. Han & E. Poppel (Berlin: Springer, 2011); pp. 185-198). Therefore, it could be that this singer identified himself more with the English-speaking Welsh population for most of his adult life—he lived primarily along the north coast of Wales where English is widely-spoken, away from the small village in which he was born—he admitted that after about age 6, he really did not use Welsh anymore. Now that he is retired, he finds himself engaged in activities in his first language (e.g., two Welsh-speaking choirs, Maelgwn and Conwy), about which he lacks confidence. Then again, he is an exceptionally kind person too, so it could just be that he does not see any reason to exclude anyone or judge. However, I suspect that as in Schmid’s experiments, in this case the singer’s identity and personal experiences in both English- and Welsh-speaking communities affects his views about language ability as a cultural marker.
distinction without prompting from me, before I had a chance to ask why he did not see Welshness in degrees.

I set him apart as an exception, not only because he was the only Maelgwn interviewee with this opinion, but also because the others had no hesitation is suggesting that a more-or-less Welsh distinction did in fact exist; this made his response all the more startling. I should emphasize that I am not suggesting that the other singers intended to be spiteful or derogatory. After all, I asked them the question, which encouraged them to think of it as a “yes or no” problem. Moreover, several explained to me that a fierce but friendly rivalry exists between North and South Wales, and I suspect this notion is part of the competition. North Wales’ residents endure jokes about their rural backwardness, while the southerners are more Anglicized and therefore seen by the northerners as less “traditionally” Welsh.

Furthermore, cultural identity depends upon personal experiences, and it grows out of a sense of distinctiveness. Therefore, the very act of drawing invisible boundaries (i.e., belonging to a particular group) is inherently somewhat exclusive, though sociohistorical factors—including age—may affect this process. However, among the Maelgwn interviews, only one respondent said “no,” some people/choirs are not more Welsh than others.

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18 Cf. Scourfield et al., 2006: 585, 589. I also heard derogatory comments about North Wales in Liverpool, Manchester, and elsewhere in Britain when I traveled. Obviously I cannot speak for the Welsh concerning North-South rivalry. However, the distinction is commonly made; in my experience and on popular television shows. For example, a character in BBC’s Gavin and Stacey specifically cites his home as “South Wales” (BBC One, December 24, 2008) and many participants answered the question on surveys “Where were you born?” with “North Wales.” They make this distinction without any prompting for such specifics.

19 See the subsequent sections of this chapter.
The interviewee who followed this singer explained that in the eastern part of Wales, people are more Anglicized: “…but they still sing in Welsh.” The next concisely stated that North Wales is generally “more Welsh” than South Wales. The following two interviewees explained that although language is a part of this distinction, it is also the “Welshness is general.” The second of these added: “we’re very proud to be Welsh,” suggesting, perhaps, that Welshness is intensified by one’s recognition of it and one’s joy in owning/performing it. The singer who followed suggested that it is not just the language that makes one more Welsh than another, but he could not put into words what did. He also added that Welsh men are known for being good singers, and people expect them to be so, even though some of them are not. The next singer again made the North versus South geographical distinction, and the final three credited language, with the very first adding geography and the last explaining that in addition to language, musical traditions contribute to Welshness.

In all, language was mentioned six times: once in conjunction with geography and once with music, and the other four times alone. But in each case, the singer said explicitly that language is not the only factor in making one more Welsh than another. Still, it is obviously a salient sign of Welshness to these men. Additionally, five Maelgwn men in all mentioned language use as a function of their MVC (one exclusively, and four others in addition to “friendship,” as shown above). Three of these singers consider this sign to be a factor in one’s degree of Welshness.

One specific notion that kept coming up was an affinity toward not just the Welsh language itself, but to meaningful or powerful words/lyrics. In fact, six interviewees made some reference to words being the most important thing to understand about the
choral tradition. One interviewee explained that “just being in Welsh doesn’t make something a good song.” He explained that some English lyrics—such as those sung in “Cwm Rhondda,” which is often translated from the Welsh—are so “steeped in Welsh tradition” that they are “completely Welsh.” He explained that “strong, evocative words” are essential to Welsh music. Such lyrics display a combination of being “well-crafted” but also “meaningful;” he stressed that this goes “beyond mere cleverness.”

Two conductors I interviewed (Tim Rhys-Evans of Only Men Aloud and Cefin Roberts of Ysgol Glanaethwy) corroborated this sentiment, though it could be that their concepts of word-meaning and its importance to singing are not tied to Welshness as much as just to being an effective singer. Rhys-Evans said:

… it’s got to start there, even if we’re singing a Beach Boys song, ‘God Only Knows’, we sit there and we will one by one speak the text and make sense of it as a piece of prose. MacArthur Park is a number that we do in our show, there are some pretty acid-trippy words in there—someone left a cake out in the rain, but we really delved into what is the meaning in all of that. Because how can you convey something, especially if you’re singing in a foreign language: if you don’t know what you’re singing about, how can you possibly expect to get the right sound? The power of thought I think is the most powerful tool we have, and just thinking the right emotion will color the voice, will color your face on stage, you know, your posture…

Roberts also teaches students to “know what you’re singing about.” Even when it is tedious, he takes the time to discuss all the words of the text. This can be observed in Ysgol Glanaethwy’s rehearsals, and Roberts explained that it has been brought to his

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attention as characteristic of his directing style.\textsuperscript{21} While directors like Roberts and Rhys-Evans might simply be trying to make their singers good musicians, the MVC interviewees gave the distinct impression that good poetry and lyrics are bound up with Welshness.\textsuperscript{22} Welshness is often linked to not just music, but to poetry as well. This is in line with historical accounts of Welsh bards (real or feigned): eisteddfodau are poetry-recitation competitions as well as music competitions. When I asked conductor Tim Rhys-Evans about Welshness, he explained:

As a person, I am quite wary of nationalism, you know, it certainly didn’t do Germany and the rest of the world much good in the 1930s, but what I am proud of of my country, is how one of the things we champion above all else is our culture and our music and our poetry [my emphasis]…I think that’s wonderful in a world where that isn’t always the case anymore, the fact that we do…

The eisteddfod tradition is a great example of the importance of the spoken word in Welsh culture. According to the National Eisteddfod’s website: “The Eisteddfod is the home of literature, music, dance, recitation, theatre, visual arts, science and technology, and all types of culture in Wales.”\textsuperscript{23} The competition has undoubtedly become a major domain of Welsh language use since its All-Welsh Rule, but it is meant to be a place for

\textsuperscript{21} Once while directing a rugby club choir for a televised singing competition (in which South Wales’ rugby clubs—who were not necessarily singers—competed as choirs for Welsh television station S4C), the judges told him he “talks too much in rehearsal.” His group was the winning choir in the end. He explained how at this competition, it was important for him to not only teach the pronunciation of each word carefully (these were Welsh lyrics, being taught to non-Welsh speakers), but he also felt compelled to convey the meaning of the text, as this is essential. Cefin and Rhian Roberts, interview by author, 21 June 2009, Debenhams Cafe, digital audio, Llandudno, Conwy, Wales.


the performing of Welsh culture, including—but not limited to—language, with activities that include instrumental as well as vocal music, poetry recitation, and literature. Six of the singers participating in these interviews expressed a love for poetry and meaningful lyrics. These men implied that fine poetry is a Welsh characteristic; perhaps not exclusively, but they brought it up as a marker of Welshness nonetheless.

In addition to language and poetry, geography is clearly a part of some singers’ perceptions of Welshness: five men in all made geographic distinctions in suggesting that people in North Wales are more Welsh than those in South Wales. I have to emphasize that because language is such a salient sign, it may be that in calling North Wales “more Welsh,” singers are inadvertently using the high proportion of native speakers as part of their perceptions.

However, also notable is that fact that of the five who said geography was a factor in the more-or-less Welsh debate, two did not mention language at all, and another said that South and East Wales were less Welsh even though they do sing in Welsh, implying that there is a geographical distinction despite the language factor. Of the remaining two, the first said that choir was an important means of maintaining language but that this alone does not make the group more Welsh, and the other explained that non-Welsh speakers could not put the same emotion into Welsh language lyrics, as singing in a foreign language “just isn’t the same” as singing in your own. He suggested that this is the main difference between a “very” Welsh choir like Maelgwn and less Welsh choirs.

Therefore, it is unclear whether or not North Wales is so strongly “more Welsh” to these singers because of its abundance of native speakers, or if other factors are present, as attested by the singers who stressed that it was not just language. There is a
popular term in Wales, *hiraeth*, which refers to a longing or nostalgia for something. However, it is often specifically bound to place; it explains a strong emotional attachment to a location and/or time, but possibly also to a person or specific experience.\(^\text{24}\) I suspect that affinity toward Northwest Wales is not exclusively a recognition of the space as a place for the language sign, but that is also includes emotional attachment to the landscape itself, and to the singers’ own personal experiences in that space. Garrett et al. note that “the Welsh word *gwlad* resonates through Welsh cultural history, not least in the Welsh national anthem *Hen Wlad fy Nhadau* (‘Land of my Fathers’), where *gwlad* refers to nation, nationality and territory, but also potentially to country(side) and landscape” (2005: 532). The emphasis on geography by *Maelgwn* singers could also be due to the fact that the space contains such an abundance of signs (including musical signs, such as the MVC), and/or because it is commonly known to be the least Anglicized part of the country.

Only one singer brought up visual signs in discussing Welshness. I had made it known to him that I would be interviewing North Americans of Welsh descent in the

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\(^{24}\) In only one resource did I see *hiraeth* defined as nostalgia for a person specifically (Trosset 1993: 152-3), although a North American Welsh newspaper (*Ninnau*) article (by Garnet E. Roth in Vol. 34, No. 6, 2009) featured the term in a description of experiences at the North American Festival of Wales, where one often makes “the unexpected connection…with someone who knew someone, or who lived in the same town in Wales…” Several interviewees used the term (some in more specific ways than others). One participant said: “there are many songs and hymns from my childhood giving *hiraeth*.” A North American interviewee specifically defined it as “a longing or feeling of nostalgia for both place and time,” while another North American participant suggested that the concept of *hiraeth* was an important marker of Welshness (and much more important that actual ancestry). Kimberly Bernard uses the term to describe a time: “In this way, the language was a facet of *hiraeth* for the past, a longing voiced by many…for a time when Wales was purely ‘Welsh,’” [before Anglicization], Kimberly Bernard, “The National Eisteddfod and the Evolution of the All-Welsh Rule,” *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter 2003): 38. Google’s translation service (www.translate.google.com) translates *hiraeth* as “nostalgia,” while in the song “Cerddwyn Ymlaen,” the lyric: “Mae ‘na *hiraeth* a dyhead Am adfywiad drwy y tir” is rendered “There's a longing and desire for a revival through the land.”
future. He, like many of the MVC singers, has performed in the US and in Canada, so I asked him what those experiences were like. He began to tell me how wonderful the Welsh-descended North Americans were, stressing that even though they do not speak Welsh at all, “they are 100%.” He then added: “well, they’re more Welsh than we are, really.” When I asked: “How so?,” he lit up. “Oh! Well, you know, they’ve got flags all over them…” he said, gesturing excitedly. He made it clear that he was genuinely impressed with the Welshness of those he met in North America, as were other singers I spoke to during my fieldwork in Wales. Several men expressed how proud they are that Welshness is maintained and celebrated in North America. All of them made some reference to North Americans not speaking the language, adding words like “of course” or “naturally,” implying that this was to be expected. They also all felt that Welsh-descended North Americans have plenty of other Welsh markers in place of language. In the case of that one particular singer, visual signs of Welshness were powerful indicators of the strength of Welsh identity in North America, even when language and (obviously) geography were completely absent.

Finally, some Maelgwn singers seemed to imply that Welshness includes a certain musicality; or at the very least, they suggested that opportunities to sing and the popularity of choral singing are typical aspects of being Welsh. One singer said that “everybody sings in school,” and another pointed out that in Wales, a love for singing is “nothing out of the ordinary.” Two others explicitly said that the choral tradition was an important part of Welsh culture. Another explained that singing “is from the cradle here,” explaining how it has always been part of the culture, and Welsh children are more oriented to it than others. He explained: “I wouldn’t say the Welsh kids have better
voices than the English kids but they have this grounding, this training…”

He and several others explained that competition from such a young age is something that gives Welsh children confidence in singing. These remarks confirm my hypothesis that for some, Welshness is bound up specifically with singing (cf. Trosset 1988: 170). This is obviously strengthened and reinforced by their own lifelong choral experiences.

Several singers could not define Welshness with words, which suggests an implicit—or at least hard to define—knowledge of the concept. They know Welshness enough to recognize it and even judge its strength or degree; however, they cannot say what its components are. Regardless, it can be stated that most of these Maelgwn singers view Welshness in degrees, confident that one can be more Welsh than another. I would suggest that being “more Welsh” simply means that one has more of these noted signs, or the ones most central and valued—e.g., language ability, geographical place, musical traditions, love of/emphasis on poetry—as part of their own individual experiences.

25 It did not escape my attention that he posed the English as the “other” with whom the Welsh were in competition. However, it could just be that the competitions he was describing are largely populated by either English or Welsh children. Still, the Welsh have long had to defend their culture from Anglicization, so comments like this were never surprising. I should also note that this choir (like most I met) has English members, and the latter are made to feel very welcome; the English singers I talked with in several choirs had only positive things to say about the inclusiveness demonstrated by their fellow choir members and by their other Welsh neighbors in general. One Maelgwn member told me that they make it clear to English or English-speaking Welsh men who are interested in joining the choir that everything is conducted in Welsh. However, both Welsh and English singers explained that if non-speakers do not understand something, the singer sitting next to him helps with translation.
Figure 7: Signs of Welshness by Maelgwn interviewees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signs of Welshness Overall*</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>Love of/Emphasis on Poetry</th>
<th>Choral Music Tradition</th>
<th>Visual Signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maelgwn (MVC)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This is a summary of all signs of Welshness suggested in interviews.

Musical Training and Thoughts About the Future

In addition to discovering signs of Welshness, these singers’ musical training and background were examined, as were their opinions about the future of the choral institution. Fifteen Maelgwn singers discussed their singing background. Of these, thirteen (87%) credited chapel experience as a source of their musical training, nine of whom described it as the primary source. Clearly, the nineteenth-century phenomenon of chapels-yielding-choral singers is still in effect for these singers. These men grew up singing in harmony at the chapel, and they cite this experience as where and how they learned to sing.
Figure 8. *Malegwn* interviewees’ background in music/singing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Where Did You Receive Your Musical Training?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Malegwn (MVC) Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (Out of 15 Singers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One of these also mentioned Eisteddfod.
**One said Chapel, Previous Choirs, and Family and another said Chapel, Previous Choirs, and Eisteddfod.

Four basic responses to the question “What do you think about the future of the choral tradition?” have been isolated: one, MVCs are declining/I am concerned over the future of the institution; two, there is a resurgence in the choral tradition/I am hopeful about its future; three, there really has not been any change and I predict none to come; and four, I am concerned because choirs are becoming more professional or elite and less amateur-oriented. Sixteen *Malegwn* singers discussed this. Overall, *Malegwn* singers are worried about the survival of their choral tradition: pessimistic responses outnumbered optimistic ones. The results are given in Figure 9 below:
In sum, *Maelgwn* singers overwhelmingly think that Welshness exists in degrees, and most of these men acquired their vocal training in the chapel. Signs of Welshness for them include musicality (specifically choral singing), love of/emphasis on poetry, language, and geographical distinctions. The latter two were used specifically to judge strength of Welshness—only one singer suggested musicality was a factor in making one “more Welsh” than another. Since Northwest Wales is the center of the Welsh language, geography in this case probably cannot be wholly separated from language: perhaps the reason Northwest Wales is “so Welsh” for some is because it is where all the Welsh-speakers are. In other words, language is such a salient sign that respondents may be blurring the boundaries between the area itself and its resident Welsh speakers. As shown in the previous chapter, Welsh nationalism has always rallied around the language.

However, some singers specifically said that Welshness *was not* just dependent upon the language. These Welsh speakers suggested that they do not think speaking Welsh is what really makes someone Welsh. Although antiquity is often summoned (sometimes erroneously) to validate such associations, it appears that Northwest Wales
has been viewed as distinctive, and perhaps the Welshest part of Wales, for hundreds of, or even a thousand, years. Ian Bremner writes:

When faced by a strong English king or an aggressive generation of Marcher lords, the native Welsh princes would be hemmed within the ancient principality of Gwynedd in the north-west: greater Snowdonia and neighbouring Anglesey. Here we can see a clear continuation of a separate Welsh society, with clear traditions, customs and native laws.26

Therefore, it appears that the history of the region—from the Welsh princes’ Medieval strongholds to the relatively isolated rural farmers in the centuries that followed—may have contributed to a particularly strong association between Welshness and Northwest Wales for many people.

While there are too few respondents to make any certain claims, one can surmise that Welshness for many of the Maelgwn singers is bound up with language. However, it also includes musicality,27 a love of/emphasis on poetry, and Northwest Wales itself, as not only a space where these signs are alive and well, but possibly as a sign unto itself.


27 It is notable that one Maelgwn singer said that Welsh men are expected to be good singers, even though many are not. This response highlights the difficulty in sorting out perceptions from inside the group versus those outside the group. It also reminds one of the difficulty in determining what associations are part of an individual’s Welshness, given that such fieldwork methods are only measuring respondents’ descriptions of what are often ineffable concepts (cf. R. Feinberg and J. Genz 2012).
Women in the Welsh Choral Tradition

It was through the kindness of Côr Meibion Maelgwn’s conductor Trystan Lewis that I was able to conduct much of the fieldwork for this section. In addition to Maelgwn, Lewis conducts the local mixed-sex choir, and it was here that I was able to speak with female singers about these same topics. While at university, Lewis had been part of several choirs both as a conductor and singer, performing oratorios several times per year.28 When he returned to the Conwy area, he held rehearsals for a televised gymanfa ganu called Dechrau Canu, Dechrau Cannmol.29 He suggested to the singers that they form a mixed choir, and a few approached him expressing interest. There had not been a mixed choir in the area for decades; two local choral societies both disbanded in the 1970s. Lewis explained that there is currently another choral society in Colwyn Bay (approximately six miles from Conwy) that is fifty years old, but “it has more of an English feel to it.” Thus, Lewis formed Côr Cymysg Dyffryn Conwy (the Conwy Valley Mixed Choir) in 2004.30

I was fortunate to attend their rehearsals and concerts throughout the winter and spring (2008-2009). It was here that I spoke most often and most candidly with female Welsh (adult) singers. Several of the men in this choir were also in Maelgwn, since it

28 This information comes from my interview with Lewis (Trystan Lewis, interview by author, 15 May 2009, Siop Lyfrau Lewis, digital audio, Llandudno, Conwy, Wales) unless otherwise indicated.

29 Dechrau Canu, Dechrau Cannmol (roughly “Start Singing, Start Praising”) is a Welsh-language television program that, like all cymanoedd canu, focuses on congregational hymn-singing in harmony. Since 1961, this show has traveled throughout Wales featuring various congregations singing in Welsh. It spawned a popular English-language version on BBC One called Songs of Praise.

was the local MVC, so I mostly focused on getting to know the women. All of the adult female interviewees were from this group, and some from this choir also participated in the song surveys featured in Chapter IV.\textsuperscript{31}

The \textit{Conwy Valley Mixed Choir} is part of a long history of mixed-sex, classical repertoire-singing groups in Wales. Yet while this tradition, along with MVC and Youth choirs, was developing in nineteenth-century Wales, infamous negative images of Welsh women were being constructed. Welsh women were accused of being particularly inferior and even immoral characters, in comparison to other—i.e., English—women. These accusations were highlighted in the famous “Blue Book” Reports of 1847, which were English investigations into the state of Welsh education (Beddoes 230-1, 234 and Kreider 2002: 25). In addition to being bigoted and misogynistic, these unfounded constructions undermined women’s immense role in contributing to their families’ income and well-being. Not only did women have enormous responsibilities at home (taking care of their own family and sometimes boarders as well), but many also worked outside the home, especially during the war years of the early twentieth century (Cf. Mari A. Williams 2000: 178).

As noted earlier, Welsh females were even blamed for the demise of the language. Several commentators, and then, more officially, a Board of Education Report in 1927, claimed that girls were much more likely to “drift into English” than boys, while two Nonconformist ministers (in 1914 and 1927) cited women specifically as being the ones responsible for excessive Anglicization (Mari A. Williams 2000: 145, 170).

\textsuperscript{31} The all-ladies \textit{Côr Merched Bro Nest} also participated in the song surveys (see the following chapter).
But despite efforts to defend the women of Wales against these insults, all-male Welsh signs remained the most salient: according to Deirdre Beddoe, the traditional signs are male signs—rugby, mining, and the MVC tradition (in Curtis 1986: 227). While women did not have the recreation time afforded to men in the industrialized society of the nineteenth century, they still were part of the choral tradition: there are records of Welsh Mixed choirs from the nineteenth century in both Wales and in North America. Yet it is obvious that all-male choirs are still seen as more salient signs of Welshness. This association is immediately apparent outside the group, as evidenced by travel literature and television programs about Wales.\(^{32}\) But it is not exclusively an “outsider” perception: in surveys, two women chose MVCs as the performers of songs they consider the best signs of Welshness, and two female interviewees called MVCs the “most Welsh” (because of their traditional repertoire) and the “most popular” of the Welsh choirs. In an undocumented conversation with several Conwy singers, the ladies lamented the fact that MVCs in Wales have more performing and travel opportunities, just because they are MVCs—even if they are not good choirs.

In interviews with Ysgol Glanaethwy, seven teenagers mentioned MVCs in their predictions about the future of the Welsh choral institution: five (three females and two males) suggested that MVCs are either growing in popularity and numbers or are otherwise still strong, while a sixth (female) felt that MVCs are diminishing and mixed-sex choirs are increasing. The seventh was a male singer who “definitely” plans on joining his local MVC when he finishes school.

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As discussed in Chapter II, the website *British Choirs on the Net* (http://www.choirs.org.uk) lists 2,734 British choirs that have websites and/or email contact information. It should be restated, however, that these data are limited by the fact that the list only includes choirs that have websites or advertised email contacts. Some group names do not indicate whether the group is mixed- or single-sex. For example, *Côr y Penrhyn* is listed without the tag “Male Voice” or the Welsh “Meibion,” whereas many others do use that phrase. When this was the case, I conducted a Google search to determine the makeup of the ensemble. Of the 181 Welsh choirs listed, I could find no website or other information for five groups. Thus, out of 176 Welsh choirs, there are 85 MVCs, 64 Mixed Choirs, 25 Ladies Choirs, and 3 Youth Choirs. Obviously, since this only includes those choirs with an online presence, it is limited as to how much it reveals about the numbers of different choir types in Wales today. However, what it *does* show—at least via the web—is the continued salience of MVCs in Wales, and the underrepresentation of all-female groups.

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33 For instance, the Ladies choir surveyed for this dissertation, *Côr Merched Bro Nest*, is not listed, nor are either of the Youth choirs featured in this chapter. *Ysgol Glanaethwy* does not have a website but they do have a Facebook fan page through which they can be contacted.
Two sentiments expressed by the Conwy interviewees were the ubiquity of choral singing in Wales and fewer opportunities for female singers than for male singers. Despite the smaller number of available adult female participants in this dissertation, their responses provide important insight into Welsh women’s opinions about choral membership and choral repertoire. The women ranged in age from late 20s to 70s. The choir has a notable female majority: I counted forty-three women and only seventeen to twenty-two men.

As with the men of Maelgwn, the women’s responses have been divided into the following categories: the function of their choral membership; their views of Welshness, specifically with regard to identity-by-degree (can one be more Welsh than another, and why?); their singing background and prior musical experience; and their opinions about the future of the choral institution.

Functions of Choral Membership

The Conwy women expressed similar reasons for choir membership to those explained by the men of Maelgwn. Of the eight women who answered the question of

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34 Only ten women participated in formal interviews: four women filled in interview answers on paper and the other six participated in face-to-face interviews November 25 and December, 2, 4, 9, 11, 2008. Although I attended rehearsals weekly, the women were much more reluctant to participate than were the men of Maelgwn. Overall this choir has many more singers in the median ages, seemingly more than Maelgwn or any of the other MVCs I encountered, though I do not have exact age information for many of the women. In Conwy, there is clearly a larger group of middle-aged singers, despite a few outliers (a couple 20-somethings, and a few over age 70 or so). MVCs tend to have more older singers (60+) overall. The exception in this dissertation is Only Men Aloud, which is comprised of men in their twenties, thirties, and forties.

35 Photos on the group’s website confirm these numbers (http://corgymysdyffrynconwy.weebly.com/index.html). Like all choirs, membership varies by rehearsal and concert. This is not surprising given that singers are volunteers; their availability and commitment level affect total attendance at each event.
why they are in the choir, seven attributed their interest to a social function of some kind. The other was interested in the high standards of this particular conductor and choir. However, it should be noted that five women in all mentioned the love of singing or the love/challenge of the repertoire as part of their impetus to sing with this particular group. Only one singer mentioned the language (in addition to the social element): she joined this choir in part to meet other native speakers, and to be able to communicate in Welsh. In sum, most cited friendship as their reason for joining (seven of eight), but over half mentioned musical opportunities as an impetus for joining this particular group (five of eight).

Figure 11. *Conwy* interviewees’ reasons for being in the choir.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Why Are You in This Choir?/Why is it Important to You to Be a Member?</th>
<th>Friendship</th>
<th>Friendship and Musical Opportunities</th>
<th>Musical Opportunities</th>
<th>Language Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Conwy</em> (Mixed) Responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (Out of 8 Singers)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These interviewees were females only, despite this being a mixed choir.
**This interviewee is also listed among those who said “Friendship.”

*Perceptions of Welshness*

The Welsh language as a factor in making someone or some group “more Welsh” than another was not nearly as salient in *Conwy* as it was among the MVC answers. Although all of the eight women asked answered “yes” to the question: “are some people or some choirs more Welsh than others?” only one mentioned language as a part of this distinction. She said it is dependent on a person’s upbringing, rather than the music they
sing, and that “the language is part of that.” Half of the female singers suggested that being more Welsh is bound up with musicality, including musical training from a young age, high performance standards, and growing up with the choral tradition. Of the other four responses, one credited language as part (as discussed above), two singers could not put into words what exactly makes someone more Welsh—though both asserted that it is more than just the language ability, and the other made the geographical distinction so prevalent in the MVC answers. The latter said of North Wales versus South Wales: it is not just language, adding (jokingly, with a wink and a nudge): “they’re half English down there!”

Figure 12. Conwy interviewees’ views about the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of Welshness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions: Are Some People/Some Choirs More Welsh Than Others?</th>
<th></th>
<th>If “Yes,” Why?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conwy (Mixed) Responses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (Out of 8 Singers)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is obvious from a quick glance at the female responses that Welshness for many of these singers is bound up with musicality. Half the interviewees from this group specifically said that musicality is what makes someone more Welsh than another. But
even more interesting is the fact that all interviewees from this group agreed that musicality is associated with Welshness.36

Four Conwy interviewees completed their answers on paper, as opposed to a face-to-face interview.37 Only one of these respondents did not give an explanation as to why she thought the Welsh are especially musical. The other three were more explicit about their reasons. The first said: “Whether it’s due to an inborn ability to harmonize or training from an early age, I don’t know. We all love singing!” The second said: “The Welsh are musical—it’s in their blood, they grow up with it! If you go to chapel, you sing. You go to school and you’re in a choir. It means you’re exposed to it whether you want to be or not!” The third explained: “We have a lot of traditional folk songs and the eisteddfod.”

36 Although this point sheds light on the women’s views of music and Welsh identity, it cannot be directly contrasted with the men’s responses because I did not ask the men explicitly “Are Welsh people particularly musical?” However, six of the men—of their accord—did also mention musicality as part of Welshness, though not necessarily as what makes one more Welsh. It is notable, however, that half the ladies brought up musicality before I did, and this was part of their explanations of how one can be more Welsh than another.

37 Despite conductor Trystan Lewis once again introducing me and urging singers to participate in my fieldwork, singers in this group were slow to take part. I attended rehearsals for many weeks without a single interview, so I wrote up a paper version of the interview and gave Conwy singers the choice between writing out answers or talking with me about them. Four women completed the paper interview, while six chose to speak to me face-to-face. The latter group’s answers tend to be more in-depth because of the conversational style of the interview.
All six female face-to-face interviewees talked at length about Welshness and musicality. One explained that her home village has three MVCs, a Youth, a Mixed, and an all-girls choir: “It’s just something that’s always been,” she said, adding that it is part of Wales and Welshness. Four other women also specifically credited the choral tradition with making Welsh culture distinctive. For instance, two said that traditional songs, including hymns, and choirs in particular are what make Wales so musical. One of these women even added: “…after all, this is the Land of Song.” She felt that MVCs are particularly Welsh, but then thought about it more and said “but there is a variety of choirs…” Another singer explained that the choral tradition is “a very old tradition” and formerly served as a community’s only social event. One other singer who discussed the choral tradition suggested that there is “a separate musicality in a really Welsh choir,” adding that Mixed choirs in particular represent the Welsh chapel tradition because of their four-part singing, male and female together.

The final respondent from this face-to-face group was an English singer who had moved to Wales in 2002. She described the Welsh as “definitely” having an enthusiasm for music. She had heard this before arriving in Wales, but was struck by its intensity and noted: “it’s really amazing when you actually experience it!” She told a story of
when she first arrived and found herself in a situation where people were singing.

“Everybody joined in…and how they sing out!” she exclaimed, gesturing to indicate a big sound. “You’d never get English people to do that!” she said, and then she jokingly mimicked a quiet, mumbling person to show how an English version might look. Her answer was similar to another English singer’s assessment of Welsh enthusiasm for music. This singer (a male) raved about the amount and quality of music in Wales. When I asked him how it compared to his home area in England (Leicester), he said the difference in both quantity and quality was staggering. He suggested that there is a “phenomenal amount more here in Northwest Wales” than there is in England.

Musical Training and Thoughts About the Future

Concerning the previous musical experience of the female singers of Conwy, seven of ten (70%) cited chapel singing as part of their training. Of these seven, four also mentioned school, two added eisteddfodau and three credited other choirs. Two singers said that they learned at home from a musical family; one of these also mentioned singing in school, and another singer just mentioned her previous choirs. Clearly, as with the Maelgwn singers, the chapel is a major source of vocal training for singers in the Conwy Valley Mixed Choir.
Figure 14. Conwy interviewees’ background in music/singing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Where Did You Receive Your Musical Training?</th>
<th>Conwy (Mixed) Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primarily Chapel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (Out of 10 Singers)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One of these also added “School.”

The Conwy singers share similar musical training with the men of Maelgwn: 70% and 87% of singers, respectively, learned to sing in chapel. However, the two groups differed in their opinions about the future of the choral institution: the ladies were much more optimistic overall. As with the men, women’s responses to “What do you think about the future of the choral institution in Wales?” are categorized here for discussion (the first three of these categories were also expressed by the men): one, I am concerned about the future of the institution; two, I think there is a resurgence/I am hopeful about its future; three, I do not think there has been any change and I do not predict any. The final category used in assessing the men’s answers—I am concerned because choirs are becoming more elite and less amateur-oriented—was not expressed by any of the women.

On the contrary, several did say that choral standards have gone up in Wales, but they tended to see this as a positive indication of the choral institution’s longevity, rather than a change for the worse. There did not seem to be concern regarding amateurism versus professionalism in the choral institution among the women. However, two Conwy interviewees did say that they felt compelled to join this group because the conductor did
not require auditions, and because the choir does not compete; both admitted that they probably would not have joined otherwise. So despite the choir’s amateur status being attractive to these women—maybe as a result of their own insecurities, or a desire for musical experience without the pressure of competition—they still talked about increasing professionalism as a positive quality in the Welsh choral institution.

While ten men expressed concern over the survival of the institution (with only four of these being hopeful for a resurgence), only two women expressed any concern about the institution fading away, and both were ambivalent. One female said that for a while she worried that being in a choir was no longer “cool” among young Welsh people, but now she thinks the choral tradition is “making a comeback,” partially because of its recent appearance in popular media. The other said that traditional choirs are fading “because the Welsh language is dying,” but at the same time the institution is growing through new choirs like Glanaethwy, who encourage young people to get involved in choral singing. This singer also said that the eisteddfod tradition will keep the choral tradition alive. The most common answers among the ladies were that the choral tradition has not changed and will remain strong (four responses), and that the standards are getting higher and the tradition is stronger than ever (five responses in all, two with some initial concern).

38 She specifically mentioned the show Last Choir Standing, which will be discussed at length in Chapter V.
The results of the Conwy interviews show that like Maegwn, this choir functions primarily as a domain for friendship and socializing. However, nearly as many women mentioned musical experience as a reason for membership in this choir, including a love of singing and a love for choral and/or challenging repertoire.

As such, it could be that women have more limited options when it comes to community choirs in Northwest Wales due to the attention paid to MVCs and the consequent lack of interest in all-female groups. Moreover, the impetus of classically-trained conductors (like Trystan Lewis) to form Mixed choirs, largely because of the repertoire, may mean that women in Northwest Wales will continue to have only this one form of choir in which to participate. It should also be noted that like both Youth choirs discussed in the following section, Conwy Mixed has more females than males: women outnumber men in Conwy roughly 2:1. For women in Northwest Wales, it seems that a Mixed choir is their primary option for choral membership. Therefore, in addition to being a place to make friends, this group fulfills their desire for participation in musical activities. Such opportunities may be rare or at least limited for them. This might explain their awareness that it is not just camaraderie that draws them to Conwy, but
instead, choir also provides one of the few chances they have to be in a musical ensemble. After all, MVCs are the most plentiful, and men can also be in mixed groups (many men I met are in both types).

Youth Choirs in Northwest Wales

The first youth choir encountered in my fieldwork was Côr Ieuenctid Môn. They competed in the North Wales Choral Competition in Llandudno in 2008, and I witnessed the choir discussing their victory that day. I managed to speak with four female teenagers, ages 14, 15, 15, and 16. This was a small group of interviewees, and they would only talk together in a group, so there are limitations to claims I can make based on the information they shared with me. For example, one would say something, and then the other three would agree and add their own opinions, perhaps influenced by what the first had said. Other times, they all spoke at once.

However, it is notable that all four repeatedly brought up the fact that theirs is a Welsh-speaking choir, and this is both a reason to be proud and a characteristic that makes them distinctive. “It shows our Welshness,” one of them said. They all agreed that it is a feature that sets them apart from other Youth choirs. Another asked: “Did you see how we were the only ones singing all in Welsh?” (they were the only choir in the Youth division to sing in Welsh that day). They collectively complained about people in Wales who refuse to learn the language or who see no value in doing so.

Despite my awareness of the caveats of trying to interview four teenagers simultaneously, I did ask them “Do you think someone can be more Welsh than

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39 Their name translates as the Môn Youth Choir, Môn being the Welsh name of the island of Anglesey, off the northwest coast of Wales.
another?” They answered “yes!,” the youngest of the girls using herself and her father as an example. Expecting her to talk about how Welsh her father was, she did the opposite—she explained that her father lives in Cardiff and “he can’t even talk…can’t speak Welsh!” She said this with an exasperated look on her face. The other girls joined in, marveling at the fact that Cardiff was “the capital city, and people there are speaking English…they can’t even speak the language!” To these girls, Welshness seemed to be entirely bound up with language ability.

One of the factors that set them apart from the older singers from the previous discussion is their background in music. They explained that although they have sung in plenty of churches, the chapels themselves “are not the main point.” When I inquired as to what they meant by this, they all explained how churches are common places to perform concerts, but these concerts are not religious. There was one point on which they agreed with many of the MVC participants: Welsh music is all about the lyrics. The girls said that Welsh songs tend to tell a story, and it is the stories and the feelings that are essential to Welsh music.

Obviously, one could hardly generalize about Youth singers in Northwest Wales based on this one conversation with such a small sample of participants. However, this preliminary interview prompted two questions: one, is chapel attendance waning to the

40 This conversation differed from the more standardized interview questions asked of the Maelgwn, Conwy, and Glanaethwy singers. Moreover, the nature of the conversation—all four teens talking at once, and often just three of them reiterating what the first said—led me to not include their responses in the subsequent section. However, it is interesting that their replies are closest to the MVC answers, and quite different from the other Youth singers I interviewed. Perhaps having just experienced the North Wales Choral Competition, in which they were the only young singers singing in Welsh, caused these girls—or at least the one who initiated all the responses—to see language as a sign that needs to be emphasized and protected. Moreover, one of the girls has a non-Welsh-speaking father in South Wales, so this could be a point of contention. As such, it might cause her to view language in a different light than a teenager with two native-speaking parents. Another of the girls is English-born, but learned to speak Welsh fluently. Again, this personal experience with the language undoubtedly colors her perception of it in a different way than that of those with different experiences.
point that it no longer functions as a training ground for Welsh singers?; and two, because this research is centered exclusively in Northwest Wales, will Welshness be exclusive and in degrees, bound up with language, regardless of the age of the participants? My next encounter with a teenage choir would provide some surprising answers to these questions. It is this second Youth choir, Côr Glanaethwy (or Ysgol Glanaethwy) that provides most of the data on teenage singers in Northwest Wales. In all, twenty Glanaethwy singers, ranging in age from 14 to 18 years old, participated in interviews.

Ysgol Glanaethwy is similar in form to other choirs in this dissertation. One, like Conwy, they are a mixed choir with a female majority. Two, their repertoire—like that of the Northwest MVCs—is a mix of Welsh- and English-language songs from classical, traditional, and popular styles (see Chapter IV for details). Finally, they entertain and compete, and as shown below, the choir provides a domain for socializing, much like Maelgwn and Conwy.

As with Conwy Mixed, Glanaethwy singers were hesitant to participate, and interviews required dedicated weekly attendance on my part. Therefore, I also gave this group the option of filling out interview questions on paper instead of answering face-to-face. In all, fourteen teenage singers interviewed face-to-face, and six filled in answers on paper for a total of twenty participants. As with the other choirs, occasionally a singer would not answer a particular question, so numbers will vary depending upon the question; this will be noted in the discussion.
Functions of Choral Membership

Fifteen of twenty Glanaethwy singers (75%) cited “making friends/friendship/socializing” as the reason they are in the choir. As with the Conwy ladies, many singers mentioned things other than friendship (sometimes in combination with friendship), namely love of music or desire to improve on skills, performing opportunities, and/or travel opportunities.

Figure 16. Glanaethwy interviewees’ reasons for being in the choir.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Why Are You in This Choir?/Why is it Important to You to Be a Member?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Glanaethwy (Youth) Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (Out of 20 Singers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One of these also added Performing Opportunities.

Clearly, friendship is the most common impetus for being a member of the Glanaethwy Choir, a result that echoes those of Maelgwn and Conwy. However, unlike the men—who overwhelmingly chose friendship as their choir’s primary function, with only two of thirteen men suggesting anything else—the teenagers see their choir as
providing much more than just a domain for socializing. Responses such as: “My brother was in [the choir] too, and he got to go to London and everywhere to perform and I wanted to do that too,” and “…performing is such a buzz, an adrenaline rush” support this argument, as do the numbers of other functions stated (as shown above).

**Perceptions of Welshness**

What is most immediately noticeable in the Youth data are the few mentions of language, and no mentions of geography, as markers of distinction among Welsh people or choirs. In fact, the question: “Do you think some people or some choirs are more Welsh than others?” was met with troubled, annoyed, and/or bewildered faces in all *Glanaethwy* interviews.

Of the twelve face-to-face interviewees who answered this question, only half said “yes,” but all said it hesitantly and with lengthy explanations. Their answers are discussed below. The first of these affirmative answers was: “ehhh…I don’t know, I suppose it depends what they sing?” The next actually shook her head no, but then said: “well, yeah I guess…it depends whether or not they’re dedicated to the language. I mean, here it’s fine if we speak English but they prefer we speak Welsh because, well, we’re Welsh, we’re a Welsh choir.” The third said: “mmmm…yeaaahhh…well, like in the south, a lot don’t speak Welsh…” The final three all explained that MVCs sing more

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41 One male teenage singer explained that the choir does “keep the language,” but he said this flippantly. He also noted that Welshness is “not competitive,” and the fact that they speak Welsh does not necessarily make them more Welsh than those who do not. Just two teenagers suggested that speaking the language might make one more Welsh. However, the other five suggested that “singing traditional repertoire” might be a factor in making a “really” Welsh choir. This is discussed at length in subsequent sections.
traditional repertoire and this makes them more Welsh, but each also added that they think the variety of their own choir’s repertoire is a good thing.

Only one among the five on-paper interviews featured an affirmative answer to this question. Like the others mentioned above, she suggested it is a matter of repertoire. In all, out of seventeen teenage singers who answered this question, ten answered “no.” Although these numbers represent only a 59% majority of Glanaethwy singers who think one cannot be more Welsh than another, it is starkly different from the emphatic, near-unanimity of the adult responses: twenty of twenty-one adults said an unequivocal “yes!”

As discussed above, I suspect by the looks on their faces and their hesitation in answering that even the young singers who said “yes” were skeptical. But even in accepting the seven affirmative answers as clear “yes” votes, the ten negative answers were often just as vehemently inclusive as the adults’ were exclusive.

Among the negative responses, there were four simple “No”/ “No, not really”/ “No, I don’t think so” answers. A fifth girl looked rather put-out as she said: “No. I’ve never thought about that.” A sixth female singer explained: “No, some people speak Welsh as their first language, some don’t. I guess…songs they sing? I don’t know…flags on their outfits? (giggles) No…” A seventh (also female) said: “No, I don’t think so, it’s what you believe in more than anything else.”

The eighth respondent, a male (age 16) repeated an emphatic “NO” several times. Then he added: “We’re speaking the language…keep it, that’s what we’re doing. It’s not competitive.” The final two were “No, because we’re all Welsh” and “Not really, most Welsh people are proud to be Welsh.”
In sum, only seven of seventeen teenagers see Welshness as exclusive and by degrees: two based on language use, five on repertoire, i.e., traditional music.\textsuperscript{42}

However, it should be stressed that several of these shook their heads no, and/or otherwise showed signs of being unsure (“ehhh” or “ummm” coupled with skeptical looks, mostly) before saying “yes…” or “I guess…”

Figure 17. \textit{Glanaethwy} interviewees’ views about the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of Welshness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions:</th>
<th>Are Some People/Some Choirs More Welsh Than Others?</th>
<th>If “Yes,” Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are Some People/Some Choirs More Welsh Than Others?</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Glanaethwy (Youth) Responses}</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (Out of 17 Singers)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One singer (whose response is not counted here because she left it blank on her paper interview) wrote “no” for this question initially, then scratched it out and left it blank. I overheard her talking with a male teenager later who was also filling out one of these paper interviews, and she told him “I didn’t know what to write, it doesn’t make sense,” to which he agreed, adding “yeah, it’s rubbish, it doesn’t make any sense.” This

\textsuperscript{42} Although they were choosing “traditional repertoire” as the sign that increased Welshness, I cannot wholly disregard the possibility that language is a factor (since many—though not all—traditional songs are in Welsh). Since not one of them mentioned language, but only “songs,” “music,” or “repertoire,” I have presented the data as musicality rather than language. However, it should be noted that there may be an association between these so-called “traditional” songs and the fact that they are most likely in Welsh. Then again, most of \textit{Glanaethwy}’s repertoire is in Welsh, despite it generally being more modern than the so-called “traditional” repertoire of the MVCs.
discussion was on-par with the facial expressions encountered in interviews. It seemed to me that even when one of them answered “yes,” they looked as if they were struggling with the concept.

Thus, I got the impression that such an exclusive Welshness was not something they were comfortable with, and perhaps was something they had never considered. I was particularly struck by this after hearing all but one adult interviewee answer “yes,” often without hesitation and usually with qualifiers such as “definitely” and “without a doubt.” On the other hand, here were teens giving confident, definitive “no” answers, with only a minority of them offering hesitant, skeptical versions of: “mmm, yeah, I guess…” Many of these affirmative answers included raised voices at the end of the answer (as in a question), which I suspect was most likely due to them thinking “that does not sound right but I suppose one could be?” or “is this what she wants to hear?” As with the adults, it must be noted that I primed these interviewees to think of Welshness by degree just in presenting the question to them. However, I stand by my conviction that based on these results, the youth differ notably from the adults in their inclusive perceptions of Welshness. They lack the gradations or distinctions of Welshness so prevalent in the adults’ responses, presumably because they have less complex models of Welshness.
Figure 18: Signs of Welshness expressed by *Glanaethwy* interviewees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signs of Welshness Overall</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>Love of/Emphasis on Poetry</th>
<th>Choral Music Tradition</th>
<th>Visual Signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Glanaethwy (Youth) Responses</strong></td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5**</td>
<td>1***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two of these explained that speaking Welsh does not make them more Welsh than those who do not.*

**These were all with regard to repertoire (whether or not it is “traditional”).

***This remark was made in jest by an interviewee who clearly thought the question of whether or not someone is more or less Welsh than another is ridiculous.

It is immediately apparent from Figure 18 above that there are fewer signs overall mentioned in the Youth interviews; this is also reflective of a potentially less-developed Welshness. I suggest two specific reasons for this. One, their age might simply mean that they have had less experience making associations between their own culture and various markers. Fewer years to reflect on what it means to be Welsh would result in fewer recognized signs. Put simply, perhaps they lack the self-reflection and nostalgia of the adults, just because they have not lived as long. The other is that growing up in the heart of Welsh-speaking Wales *after* the battles over language legislation have been won, they have not had the experiences of defending their cultural signs like many of the adults have. Being completely surrounded by others who share many of their signs of Welshness means they may not have had to think about cultural identity. Thus, to the teenagers of *Glanaethwy*, Welshness seems at once less definable and more inclusive.
Musical Training and Thoughts About the Future

Another major difference between the adult and the youth responses concerns their musical training. Not surprisingly, the chapel no longer seems to be a major training environment for choral singers. Of the eleven Glanaethwy teens who discussed their musical backgrounds (whether face-to-face or via a printed interview), only four cited chapel experience as part of their musical training (36% of teen participants). It is also notable that all “chapel” answers were in tandem with “school” and/or “eisteddfod,” never just chapel alone. In fact, all eleven answered “school” as a source for their choral training. Clearly, these results are notably different from the adults’ responses, in which eighteen of twenty-three cited chapel experience (78% of the total adult participants). These results confirm the opinions of one Maelgwn singer, who astutely noted that “good music teachers in school counteract the waning chapel attendance.” A few female adult singers also mentioned that Welsh schools are major centers/sources of choral music experience today, particularly in the spring, when the students are presumably preparing for eisteddfodau, both local and national.

Figure 19. Glanaethwy interviewees’ background in music/singing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Glanaethwy (Youth) Responses</th>
<th>Where Did You Receive Your Musical Training?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primarily in the Chapel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (Out of 11 Singers)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Of these 4 who cited a combination of both Chapel and School, 2 also added Eisteddfod.
Also in sharp contrast to the adult answers were the teenagers’ opinions about the future of choral singing in Wales. Eighteen *Glanaethwy* singers discussed their thoughts on the future of the institution. Only two did *not* suggest that the tradition is actually growing stronger: one was unclear (she answered “I think some choirs are more popular than others”)

and another said “the Welsh language is slowly fading away, and so is the choir tradition. Not many kids of my age are a member of any choir.” The other sixteen were clearly positive about the future of the tradition.

Figure 20. *Glanaethwy* opinions about the future of the Welsh choral tradition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>What are Your Thoughts About the Future of the Choral Institution?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Glanaethwy (Youth) Responses</strong></td>
<td>Declining/Concerned About Survival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (Out of 17 Singers)*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*There were 18 who answered, but one gave an unclear answer (“I think some choirs are more popular than others”).

**This person specified that MVCs are “maybe” declining, but that Mixed choirs are growing.

Specifically, fourteen teens said the institution is growing/becoming more popular, one said it was strong and “just keeps going,” another said MVCs are decreasing in numbers but Mixed choirs are increasing, and only two were not positive about its growth and survival. It is also notable that six young singers mentioned MVCs, and only one of these suggested that they are diminishing. In fact, the others all implied that

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43 This was a paper interview, so I was not able to ask her to elaborate.
MVCs are the most salient, as the most popular and the most plentiful choir type in Wales.

Discussion: Welshness in Northwest Wales

In this final section, the data from all three sets of interview responses are compared and discussed, showing how sociohistorical factors may explain the results. Before this discussion, it should be emphasized again that cultural identity is individual and primarily based on personal experiences. As such, I cannot generalize about Welshness based on these few responses. Furthermore, I can only make suggestions as to why there are patterns in the data, but obviously cannot “prove” relationships between sociohistorical factors and respondents’ answers. Nevertheless, such factors are noted and suggestions are presented about how certain factors might have given rise to the answers.

Functions of Choral Membership

Friendship is clearly the most common reason for being in a choir for all of the singers interviewed. Both Conwy and Glanaethwy cited musical experiences far more often than the men of Maelgwn (only one Maelgwn singer cited this as a reason to be in the choir). This could be due to the abundance of musical opportunities for men: there are many local MVCs and Mixed choirs, too. Perhaps the opportunity to sing is taken for granted by male singers: since singing in a choir is so stereotypical for a Welsh man, the opportunity to sing does not come to mind as a reason that needs to be stated.
There are elements that are entirely absent from Glanaethwy’s and the adults’ responses: language-use and travel, respectively. Neither is surprising given the ages of the participants, and the relative isolation of the teens. While the adults have had to work and interact in their second language (English) all their lives, the teenagers have spent their lives in Welsh-speaking Gwynedd County, where they speak their native first language at home and at school. Moreover, for their entire lives, Welsh has been printed on road signs and spoken on the television. Therefore, it is easy to see why they would not need to seek out a choir specifically for the chance to use the Welsh language. Choir must hardly seem like an important means of maintaining or saving the language when there are so many other domains—school, media, etc.—already serving this function in their own personal experiences. Furthermore, it is understandably exciting for rural teenagers to be able to go abroad and perform, so it is not surprising to find this as a function of their choral membership.

*Musical Training and Thoughts About the Future*

All adults (*Maelgwn* and *Conwy*) named the chapel more than any other source of musical training, while the teens said school more often than anything else. This makes sense given waning chapel attendance among the young in the UK, as does the fact that such young singers would not list “other choirs” as part of their musical backgrounds. Family as a source of musical training was mentioned most often by adult female singers, which might reflect a tendency for adult women to recognize home life as a source of musicality. I am reminded of one of my visits with the *Conwy* choir, when a few female singers were explaining how salient MVCs are in Wales: “the male singer is what people
know from Wales…” one singer said. Then she added: “and who do people think taught the children those songs—the women!” This singer implied that women’s roles in maintaining Welsh musical traditions are underestimated. However, my data set is too small to permit more certain claims.

Patterns by age and sex can be deciphered in the singers’ opinions about the future of Welsh choral singing. The women and teens (the latter being a female majority) were overwhelmingly more optimistic than the men, and the only teenager to express concern over the future of the institution was a male. The young singers were nearly unanimously optimistic, contrasting with the adult responses. I can make several suggestions as to why there is such a contrast between the youth/ladies and the men. First, the young singers of Glanaethwy most likely see the choral institution as strong—not just surviving, but thriving—because of the current salience of choral singing in the media in the UK. In fact, Youth singers featured here have performed on British national television in the past few years. Judging from popular media, choir is more popular than ever. The women are also hopeful about the future of Welsh choral singing, perhaps because when they see choirs like Glanaethwy succeed in national televised singing competitions, they may be inclined to assume that young Welsh people are in fact interested in singing in choirs, and thus continuing the tradition.

Also, perhaps with fewer choral opportunities than men have had, the female singers are hyper-aware of the abundance of young Welsh performers in the media, seeing this as a growth in the institution as a whole. Moreover, Mixed choirs typically have a female majority (Glanaethwy included), which might appear to the female singers in particular as a positive change in the choral institution—e.g., more females are getting

44 This idea will be expounded upon in Chapter V.
involved in choral singing means the tradition is strong/growing. It could also be that the women have “less to lose” in a manner of speaking; that is, theirs is not the stereotypical Welsh choral experience, so unlike the men of the MVCs, they do not feel that their “version” of choir is endangered. Indeed, hardly anyone suggested that there is any diminishing of Mixed choirs.45 Instead, it was the MVCs who suggested that their tradition might be fading. This sentiment—that the Welsh MVC will disappear forever—is expressed in numerous British newspaper articles as well.46

This pessimism might be because the form—and to a lesser extent, the function—of the Male Voice Choir has changed quite drastically from the choral institution’s early days. MVCs are no longer young workers from a common industry, singing in fierce competition. They are now, more often than not, groups of retired men who gather weekly to sing because choir serves as a domain for socializing. Perhaps men see these changes and think that such severe differences must equal demise.

This idea is supported in part by conductor Trystan Lewis, who suggested that in the early part of the choral institution, singers had the chapel for social events, and choir was strongly competitive. He cited several specific choirs who formed just for eisteddfodau, and then disbanded immediately afterward. Although it is unclear how

45 The one exception was the young singer who worried that not many people his age are interested in choral singing in general.

important socializing was to these “Golden Age” choir members, what is certain is that MVCs have a much more elderly membership now than they used to. In Wales, this aging process is often discussed as a sign of the demise of the MVC. Lewis explained that thirty to forty years ago, conductors were offering these same warnings: MVCs will disappear in a few decades. As shown in this dissertation, they have not; in fact, new ones are forming all the time.

Lewis recalled his early experiences with Maelgwn, when there were six or seven other young men in addition to himself, but slowly they disappeared as marital, parenting, and work obligations took precedence in their lives. Lewis became the exception—he and one other thirty-something are in a choir consisting of men mostly aged 60 and older. Several interviewees also supported these ideas in explaining how and why they got involved: they had always loved to sing but could not find time while they were working.

They also suggested that MVCs are diminishing, since so few young men show interest, 

47 Lewis did not explicitly say that choir formerly served no social function at all. However, the plethora of choirs who formed just for eisteddfodau shows that friendship/camaraderie was not the primary goal, or would they not have rehearsed all year anyway to enjoy each other’s company? It is possible that friendship was a latent function of nineteenth-century MVCs. The point here is that in Williams’ “Golden Age,” men sometimes just banded together into a MVC to compete when the eisteddfod came to town. After they competed, they split up. I take this to mean that friendship was not such choirs’ primary function, since no eisteddfod for competing meant no choir. Most MVCs today do not compete, but they each have a sense of distinctiveness, “belonging” to a particular community. Most of the “Golden Age” choir members worked together at the same job and attended the same chapel, so they did not need the MVC for friendship purposes. Still, socializing may have been part of the experience.

48 See Chapter V for details. Lewis also said that part of people’s concern may be because the number of singers per MVC tends to be smaller than in the “Golden Age” period defined by Gareth Williams, 1998: 144-5. Lewis suggested that these smaller choirs are the result of there being so many MVCs in such a small area: there simply are not enough men to go around. He noted that within a twenty-mile radius, there are probably eight to nine MVCs. Trystan Lewis, interview by author, 15 May 2009, Siop Lyfrau Lewis, digital audio, Llandudno, Conwy, Wales. Also, the area in question is a popular retirement community. The scenery is stunning and the weather is milder on the north coast than in most of the rest of the country. Many people talk about this area being a haven for retirees. I witnessed this firsthand, including when I enrolled in a weekly, free, introductory course to learn the Welsh language: in a class of twenty or so adults, I was the only non-English, non-retiree. Also, several MVC members explained that they simply had no time to be in a choir until they retired, and several older members (in lamenting the fact that MVCs are getting older and declining) explained how the choir acquires a few young singers but then always “loses them to university” or marriage and children. Therefore, it is not surprising that retired men make up the bulk of these ensembles.
and those who do are not members for long because they leave for university, marriage, and/or careers.

Therefore, I argue that MVCs may not be diminishing as much as they are changing in form: they are now older, retired men from a variety of professions. There is also a possibility that they are changing in function: they no longer gather specifically or foremost to compete, but rather to enjoy one another’s company, and to a lesser extent for the musical and linguistic experience. The importance of friendship may have always been part of the MVC tradition, but today it is obviously the most important part. The change in form is most obvious, and clearly might be causing some to view the MVC as an endangered form of Welsh choir.

Perceptions of Welshness

This section shows all the signs of Welshness expressed by men, women, and youth singers. First, the raw numbers are presented, and then percentages of the totals are given for each choir.\(^{49}\)

\(^{49}\) The proportions of specific answers compared to the total answers for that particular choir are used so that the choirs may be compared, despite their varying sample size. One of the caveats of this research is that the number of interviewees by choir is not consistent (only ten women participated, whereas sixteen men and twenty youth singers took part). Also, in some cases, a singer mentioned more than one answer. Therefore, I have shown the results by total attributions rather than by total people, and in the following figure, I have used percentages for clearer comparison. I found each percentage by taking the number of mentions or attributions of an answer (e.g., “friendship” in response to why the singer is in his/her choir) and dividing it by the total attributions per choir. For example, seventeen attributions were given as to why Maelgwn men are in that choir (11 “Friendship,” 5 “Language Use,” and 1 “Musical experience”). Eleven out of seventeen or 64.7% of all Maelgwn attributions to “Why are you in this choir? Why is it important for you to be in this choir?” were “Friendship.” This can then be compared to percentages in female and teen responses.
Figure 21. Signs of Welshness mentioned in interviews, presented first in raw numbers and then by percent of the total from each choir.

**Total Signs of Welshness in Interviews**

**Total Signs of Welshness by Percent**
The number of signs mentioned overall in the *Glanaethwy* interviews is minimal.\(^{50}\) This might simply be due to the youth singers’ ages: as mentioned earlier, they have not lived as long as the interviewees in the other two choirs, and have therefore had less time for self-reflection, particularly when it comes to their own cultural identity. I am reminded of one teenager in particular\(^ {51}\) who, when asked if some people are more Welsh than others, said “No, I’ve never thought about that…” Perhaps considering what it means to be Welsh is less common for younger people, or it may not be something they can or will articulate. Furthermore, cognitive science shows that the more experience people have, the richer their networks are and thus, the more complex their cognitive models will be (Koch 2004, cf. Pacton and Perruchet 2008). It may be that the teens have so few recognized signs because they have less varied and complex models of Welshness.

Their geographic location might also contribute to this phenomenon. Despite Bangor being a university town (and thus having perhaps a bit more diversity than the surrounding areas), it is located in rural Northwest Wales, in the heart of the Welsh-speaking part of the country. As such, these teens are surrounded by others who share many of the same signs of Welshness—including language and choral membership—that they themselves have as part of “normal” life. Because of this, they have not necessarily thought much about the signs that make up their Welshness (speaking Welsh, being in a choir, etc.). As native Welsh speakers, they are a minority in their country (20%), but it might not seem so in Bangor and in the surrounding villages. Therefore, emphasizing

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\(^{50}\) This is why I have included the raw numbers in this figure. The acknowledgment of so few signs is particularly notable when one considers that there were more teens interviewed than men or women. Thus, in twenty interviews, only eight times did someone mention a specific sign of Welshness.

\(^{51}\) She was one of the many who looked at me as if I was mad.
their own cultural distinctiveness might be less necessary or less prevalent since they are surrounded only by others in the same group.\textsuperscript{52} I think this is also why one does not find any mention of geography as a sign of Welshness among the youth interviewees. Importantly, they do not view Welshness by degrees, so one place cannot be particularly Welsh.

The youth singers and the women had the same high percentage (62.50\%) of references to choral singing as a sign of Welshness. This parallels their optimism over the future of the choral institution. Thus, for the women and teenagers, Welshness is mainly bound up with choral singing/choral music, and this tradition is stronger than ever—or at least, unchanging—in their eyes.

The sign with the most mentions among the Maelgwn interviewees was language (33.33\%), but as shown above, the men had the most varied answers for signs of Welshness overall. For instance, 18.52\% of their answers were geography, compared to just 6.25\% of the women’s answers. Like the women and teens, many men also mentioned choral singing as a sign of Welshness, but a love of poetry was mentioned just as many times (22.22\% of the total). Perhaps as the men struggle to save what they see as an endangered sign (the MVC), they may be thinking more about the other things that make one Welsh. Put another way, reflection on choral singing as an endangered sign of Welshness might cause them to think more about cultural identity in general, and about what other factors—in addition to singing—make Welsh people Welsh. The women and

\textsuperscript{52} Identity markers are utilized when they serve some individual and/or social function (Cf. Robin Cohen 1997: 129 and Sandra Wallman 1998: 198). With no “other” encountered on a daily basis, there might be less need for young Welsh people in the rural northwest to express Welshness. Also, without any perceived threat to their cultural signs, such as that experienced by the adults, who saw the number of Welsh speakers continually diminish over their lifetime, there might not necessarily be a need for the teens to emphasize these markers.
teens, on the other hand, see choir as something that is not only surviving, but growing and becoming even more popular in Wales. As such, it can be the current, predominant sign of Welshness. Moreover, the men were generally the oldest participants in this research. Presumably, they would have the most varied and complex networks of associations in their cognitive models of Welshness.

Finally, perceptions of Welshness among the choirs—particularly with regard to inclusiveness/exclusiveness—warrant discussion. Here, the biggest discrepancy was by age alone (sex does not seem to be a factor). The adults overwhelmingly see Welshness in degrees; that is, they are certain one can be more Welsh than another. The youth were far more inclusive in their views of Welshness. When asked if some people are more Welsh than others, only one of twenty-one adults answered “no,” and all affirmative answers were confident and immediate. The seven teens who said “yes,” on the other hand, were in the minority, and they answered hesitantly and seemed unsure, while ten teens gave a confident “no.”

There are several factors that might be contributing to the difference between teens and adults when it comes to perceptions of Welshness. One is that the youth have less experience with Welshness. They have had fewer years to consider and cultivate their cultural identities. The other is that despite their opportunities to perform abroad, they are (for the most part) more geographically isolated than the adults, being teenagers in a rural corner of Wales. As such, they are surrounded by other Welsh speakers and people born in their county, and so perhaps they have had less reason to feel threatened or defensive—a position that often leads to strong identity-creation.
In addition to their youth and their location, their place in history may also explain their inclusiveness. These teens were all born after language legislation required their native language in schools, on road signs, and on all public documents. This final factor is enhanced by the media: Welsh-language television (S4C) and radio (Radio Cymru) have been in existence for all of their lives. Thus, having been born after the political struggles to protect the Welsh language legally, and in a time when they see choral music all over popular media, Welshness may not seem under threat the way it might to older Welsh people.

When it came to explaining why they answered “yes” to the question “Are some people or some choirs more Welsh than others?” all interviewees cited just three reasons: language use, geography, and music. The latter was used specifically to refer to choral singing among all choirs, though this may be accounted for in part by the nature of my question (since I included “choirs” in addition to just individuals). Also, the teens who cited music as what made one “more Welsh” than another unanimously mentioned traditional repertoire as the main factor, which further shows that they may have been thinking of Welsh choirs rather than Welsh individuals. Once again, the ladies and the teens were similar in that the majority of their answers were based on music, while the men’s most common reason someone is more Welsh than another was language (42.86% of the total reasons given), followed closely by geography (35.71% of the total reasons given).

In sum, interviewees from Maelgwn Male Voice Choir, Conwy Valley Mixed Choir (women only), and Ysgol Glanaethwy joined their respective choirs primarily for social reasons. However, musical experience is also a major function for both the women

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53 Radio Cymru was launched in 1977 and S4C in 1982 (Smith 2000: 322, 337).
and teens, while language use/preservation is a consideration among the male singers. Prior musical training for all of these choirs includes chapel, school, eisteddfodau, and family, with the chapel being the most-often cited source among adults, and school the most-often cited source of training for the youth. Women and youth are overwhelmingly optimistic about the future of the Welsh choral institution, while optimism among the MVC singers was a minority response.

Of all signs of Welshness mentioned among these three interview groups, the most often-cited was choral singing (twenty-one), followed by language (seventeen). Geography and poetry were cited six times each, almost exclusively by men. Visual signs were mentioned just three times (once each by male, female, and youth respondents). However, these were always used in a unique way, posited as something separate or outside of these singers’ own personal signs of Welshness—and in the case of the youth interviewee, as a joke. For example, the one MVC singer who talked about visual signs did so in reference to North Americans of Welsh decent. The woman who mentioned visual signs did so by suggesting that “some people are regarded as more Welsh” based on their clothing, but she felt that musical traditions and traditional repertoire are the more important factors. The one teenager who mentioned visual signs did so in jest, in response to my question about more or less Welshness. These data show that choral singing is the most salient sign of Welshness, which is as predicted. The fact that language was the second most-often cited sign of Welshness also supports my argument that language is a salient (though not necessary) sign of Welshness.

Finally, these data reveal the inclusive and exclusive nature of these individuals’ Welsh cultural identity. Nearly all of the adults interviewed think some people or some
choirs are more Welsh than others, while the majority of teenagers do not. The teens who did think such degrees were possible suggested primarily repertoire-based reasons. Half the women who believe that some people are more Welsh than others also see the identity as musically-based, while the majority of men attribute increased Welshness to language and geography.

In this chapter, I have shown why singers joined their choirs, what their musical training was prior to this membership, and what they see for the future of Welsh choral singing. Some of the signs bound up within the individuals’ cognitive models of Welshness were also revealed. These are primarily music—choral singing in particular—and language. Beyond this, I reported on whether or not these interviewees think Welshness can be somehow measured and/or compared, and the reasons for their convictions. This chapter was intended to shed light on Welsh cultural identity within the choral tradition.

The next chapter features a thorough discussion of the repertoire of the choirs participating in this dissertation. How and why specific songs function as signs of Welshness will be explored. In Chapter V, the end of the choral institution’s “Golden Age” is discussed in detail. Even as work places and chapels decreased their production of choral singers, it is shown that the choral institution they once fueled nevertheless remains. Furthermore, increasing musical standards and glamorization may be new evidence of recent reinterpretation of this cultural marker. As such, a revival might be in the works.
CHAPTER IV: SONGS AS SIGNS OF WELSHNESS

Thus far, this dissertation has featured singers’ explicit views of their own personal Welshness, and patterns were noted among singers grouped via age and sex. These data included singers’ backgrounds, reasons for joining a choir, and opinions about the current and future states of the choral institution. Singers’ own perceptions of Welshness with regard to language, geography, and musicality were examined. Clearly, for many, Welshness is bound up with choral singing and choral membership. But how does this identity affect, and how is it affected by, choral repertoire?

This chapter features the results of a survey, the function of which was to gain insight into this question. Welsh choirs sing a variety of styles of music, but could singers choose a song (or songs) that represented Welshness for them? And what in or about a specific song made it such a sign of their identity? Before presenting these results, I begin with a short summary of repertoire observed during my fieldwork. Brief histories of the choirs are also presented for context. This chapter closes with a discussion of how sociohistorical factors are related to why singers chose the songs they did. Statistical analyses provide empirical evidence for relationships between singers’ choices and various social factors, including age, sex, birthplace, and language abilities. These analyses are then interpreted to suggest possible reasons for such relationships.
Choral Repertoire in Northwest Wales

The Standardization of Repertoire

It has already been shown how the Welsh choral institution developed in the nineteenth century. A standard repertoire formed along with the choirs themselves, consisting of new music by Welsh composers, arrangements of traditional Welsh songs and hymns, and well known classical pieces. At times, classical choral works were translated into the Welsh language. The set lists documented in the late nineteenth century are not unlike those I heard in Northwest Wales in 2008 and 2009. For example, one choral festival at the end of the nineteenth century is described as featuring hymns as well as pieces by Gounod and Handel, with the latter having been translated into Welsh (“Music in Wales” [July 1, 1899], 481). As shown below, nearly all of the choirs featured in this dissertation sing both hymns and classical choral works.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Male Voice Choirs are described as performing new, original compositions, such as David Jenkins’ opera The Enchanted Isle (“Music in Wales” [1901], 262). MVCs premiere new Welsh compositions to the present. Popular songs—particularly those from British and American music theater—are also prevalent today (cf. Gareth Williams 2001: 162). The latter represents the biggest change in repertoire from the turn-of-the-century choirs to MVCs today.

Competitions during the late nineteenth century often consisted of European classical pieces, including music by Bach, Mendelssohn, and Verdi (“Welsh

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1 Côr Glanaethwy does not sing as many religious songs as the other choirs. Conwy Mixed, although formed specifically for performing oratorio, also sings some Welsh hymns, just as all MVCs do.
Eisteddfodau” [1886], 476). This non-Welsh classical music was used as a criterion for legitimacy by Welsh and non-Welsh musicians alike. For instance, in 1907 an unnamed author suggested that the Welsh should reform their competition repertoire to be more varied. He/she provided a list of test pieces used in an English choral festival as a more desirable model (“Reform of Welsh Eisteddfodau” [1907], 525-6). This author also noted an abundance of Welsh composers among the current eisteddfod test pieces, and implied a consequent limitation, saying that “…composers who can boast of Welsh extraction succeed best when they merge themselves in cosmopolitan art” (526). In another example, a Welsh music professor defended the vigor of Welsh music by noting an increase in performances of complete works of European classical “choral masterpieces” (Evans 1918: 260). Thus, it appears that the inclusion of non-Welsh, classical repertoire sometimes served to legitimize Welsh choral events—for “insiders” as well as for “outsiders.”

While more in-depth discussion of repertoire will be given below, it is clear that a basic repertoire was established in the nineteenth century as choirs and sol-fa singing grew (cf. Gareth Williams 1998). Welsh choirs today sing much of the same repertoire (and at similar venues) as what was observed in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Obviously, as new pieces are written for various choir types, they are incorporated into the repertoire, and popular songs are added to classical and traditional selections. The following section details repertoire among various choir types.\footnote{By the 1860s, arrangements of Welsh airs—including “Ar Hyd y Nos” and “Men of Harlech,” both commonly sung by the MVCs during my fieldwork—were becoming popular in London, reinforcing their appeal back home (Gareth Williams 1998: 12).}

\footnote{This information is primarily a summation of pieces heard during my year of fieldwork in Northwest Wales. All of the MVC concerts described here were held in chapels. These descriptions are obviously limited because they focus on a small population. Furthermore, there are fewer data for Mixed,
Male Voice Choir Repertoire in Northwest Wales

For this section, in addition to my own observations, MVC concert programs have been consulted. These contain repertoire lists supplied by each choir, including a wider range of pieces than those sung at any one concert. Therefore, I take the MVC set lists I witnessed, along with confirmations from concert programs and conversations with singers and conductors, as representative of the choirs’ typical repertoire. However, it should be recognized that exceptions occur, in which certain pieces must be chosen to fit a particular performance—especially in the cases of required competitive repertoire, commissions, and requests by those staging events. Many of the same pieces sung at these concerts are also used in competition and in concerts outside of Wales. In fact, concerts often serve as a “testing ground” for new competition pieces. Although I observed other MVCs during my stay in Wales, five MVCs participated in surveys for this chapter.

One of the most striking differences among these MVCs lies in the impression one gets immediately of whether or not the choir provides lighter, entertaining concerts or more solemn, serious performances.4 Although repertoire is fairly consistent from choir

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4 It should be noted that while some MVC conductors sing and conduct professionally and others have non-musical occupations and direct the MVC in their spare time, it is impossible to draw a distinction between a “professional” and an “amateur” conductor in Wales, or a professional and amateur choir, as such distinctions appear (to me) to be blurred in Wales. This may be due in part to the ubiquity of music performance and competition in Wales (e.g., eisteddfodau participation), even among those who do not pursue music professionally. However, as shown below, this issue has been debated in the Welsh choir tradition since the nineteenth century and continues to affect choirs to the present (see also the following
to choir, some choirs sing more popular selections and present themselves in a lighter manner, while others’ concerts are notably more formal and also include more classical music. Furthermore, there are variations in the amount of Welsh- versus English-language repertoire among the MVCs. These distinctions are presented below.

The first Northwest MVC encountered in this fieldwork is named for its local village in Conwy County: Côr Meibion Llanrwst Ar Cylch translates as “Llanrwst and District Male Voice Choir.” A young policeman founded the group in 1986, although there had been a previous choir in Llanrwst that disbanded in 1966. George Jones took over as director in 2001. The owner of a garage/bus company, Jones was later invited to join Cantorion Colin Jones, a famous and well-respected MVC in Northwest Wales. Thus, like many MVCs since the inception of this institution, Llanrwst is led by a “non-professional” musician, while several other MVCs in this dissertation are conducted by academically-trained musicians who work in music fulltime. As noted above, such distinctions are often unclear and may not be useful. Instead, what is notable is the choir’s overall image as entertainers.

Meurig Owen describes Llanrwst MVC as “singing lighter pieces better suited to their voice power…” and music “from the London Shows” (2009: 149). I agree that Llanrwst emphasizes entertainment, a claim based not only on repertoire, but also on

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5 Meurig Owen, 2009: 148. I am saddened to note that according to Llanrwst Choir’s website (Llanrwst Choir, http://corllanrwst.webs.com/musicaldirectorandpianist.htm, accessed 26 January 2011), Jones passed away in November 2009. I am grateful for his kindness to me as I began my fieldwork. He was both helpful and encouraging and will not be forgotten.

6 I was not in contact with this choir except by email after my return to the US. However, many musicians in Northwest Wales spoke highly of this group.
humor in their performances. For example, at the St. John’s concert (14 October 2008), during the song “Kalinka,” the tenor soloist sang an absurdly long note, during which the conductor feigned a yawn and retreated to the audience. Near the end of the note, the singer waved the director back up to the altar, which served as the “stage,” and the audience laughed. There were numerous occasions of witty banter from the singers and the compère, including farcical advertising of the youngest member of the group to any prospective single ladies. The group was dressed in matching blazers, each with a badge bearing an insignia or emblem of the name of the choir. With subsequent observations, I found that this is typical attire for many of the Northwest MVCs.\(^8\)

The first two songs performed and the last two songs performed by *Llanrwst* were in Welsh.\(^9\) However, in between were solos done in English (including “They Call the Wind Mariah”), a spiritual, and also Elton John’s “Can You Feel the Love Tonight?” The second half of the concert featured more of this same eclectic mix: the same three singers performed more solos—all in English, again drawing from musicals and old love songs, although the youngest member also sang “Caro Mio Ben” in Italian.

Humor was continuously a major component. The compère repeatedly referred to the one young singer as single and available, making jokes about the choir’s goal of getting him a wife (e.g., offering to put him on ebay, selling him for 12p). The compère also joked about the weather. The conductor made witty cracks too, including ones that

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\(^7\) I remind the reader that compère is the MVC’s preferred term for the Master of Ceremonies. The former is typical for British English, the latter for American.

\(^8\) The exceptions in my observations were *Maelgwn* and *Penrhyn*. See the following discussion on these more formal choirs.

\(^9\) I will not attempt a song-by-song account of each concert I saw, but instead a summary to show what typical MVC performances include.
mocked the singers; he joked in particular about the tenor being so loud, he could be heard in the next town. It was apparent that this choir was interested in providing light entertainment.\textsuperscript{10}

The second choir observed was \textit{Côr Meibion y Penrhyn}. \textit{Penrhyn} is distinctive for several reasons. First, this is the only participating choir whose identity is bound up with both a single employer and a long, continuous history. At the St. John’s concert (16 October 2008), the director noted that the choir was “one of the oldest” in Wales.\textsuperscript{11}

Meurig Owen divides \textit{Penrhyn}’s history into two distinct periods. The first period began with the choir’s founding in the late nineteenth century. Owen describes this as a large group of singers in multiple choirs, hailing from each section of the then-prosperous Penrhyn Slate Quarry. The second period began in the 1930s, when the quarry was in decline and the sectional choirs were joined into one large group with sixty-five members. Owen describes the latter as the origin of the current MVC (2009:181). Even using this later founding date, \textit{Penrhyn} is the oldest continuous choir to participate in this dissertation.

\textit{Penrhyn} retains its name from the local quarry, from which all singers used to come. Formerly employing thousands of workers, today the struggling quarry has only a couple hundred employees. According to the choir’s website, a variety of occupations

\footnote{\textsuperscript{10} The show ended with the choir singing “Cwm Rhondda” in English—the singers were given handouts with lyrics, and the audience was asked to turn to the hymn in the worships books (which had no notation but only lyrics, and these were in English). They asked anyone who sang in a choir or would like to sing to come up and join the group for this last selection, which I did. I have chosen the Welsh title for this song, although it was sung in English by many MVCs, including on this occasion by \textit{Llanrwst}. In my own experiences as an organist, it is also sometimes called “Bread of Heaven” or “Guide me O, Thou Great Redeemer/Jehovah” (the opening line). I later learned that all MVC concerts at St. John’s end with this hymn, sung by the choir and the audience together.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{11} Their website makes a similar claim: “As one of Wales' oldest choirs, Penrhyn's repertoire reflects the traditional values of male voice singing.” \textit{Penrhyn Male Voice Choir}, 2003, http://www.corypenrhyn.org/home.htm (accessed 23 March 2011).}
are represented among the choir’s members. For example, teachers now outnumber quarry workers 4:1.\textsuperscript{12}

The *Penrhyn* singers dress more formally than any of the other MVCs presented here. For example, they wear tuxedos rather than more casual pants and blazers. Also immediately noticeable is the fact that members of this choir are younger than in most MVCs. *Penrhyn* includes several 20-40 year olds, and fewer elderly members than the other MVCs I observed. Surveys reveal the average age of the thirteen singers of *Penrhyn* to be 56, while the average age of the twelve *Llanrwst* choir members is 68.\textsuperscript{13} It was also immediately apparent that *Penrhyn* is a very popular choir in the Conwy County area, as it attracted a huge audience. This is most likely due to the reputation earned through its longevity and high quality musicianship. *Penrhyn* is conducted by a professional singer/conductor with university training.

Instead of choir member-as-compère, the director made the announcements, and he spoke quite extensively about each selection. The opening piece was from *The Flying Dutchman*, the second was based on a poem by Dylan Thomas—who the director described as a famous “Welsh bard,” who “unfortunately didn’t write in the Welsh language,” and the third was an arrangement of the Welsh hymn tune “Gwahoddiad” (“The Invitation”).

Following classical selections—including an aria from Handel’s *Judas Maccabeus*—by a soloist who was not a member of the choir, the choir returned with a Vivaldi “Gloria” in Latin, which was originally written for female voices, and then a


\textsuperscript{13} *Llanrwst* participants include one 29-year old, one 45-year old, and one 58-year old, with the remaining nine men in their 70s and 80s.
Schubert “Sanctus” sung in Welsh, though it was noted that the choir has also performed it in German. This was followed by an arrangement of the traditional love song “Lisa Lân.”

To close this half, they performed a unique piece, written to commemorate a long-standing member whose son is still in the group. It was commissioned specifically for Penrhyn. The director said “a local bard wrote the lyrics” and the music was written by a famous composer who works with the London Symphony, Gareth Glyn.

The choir returned by singing a Zimbabwean mining song (“Tsotchaioza”). This was the start of what the director called the “lighter” and more “entertaining” part of the concert. They followed this with an English song and then something from Les Misérables. There was one more appearance by the soloist. When the choir returned to finish the show, they sang “You Raise Me Up.” The director described this as having been recently made famous by the “boy band” Westlife.

The penultimate song was “The Creation,” described as a “test piece” for competitions (it had English lyrics), and the final was “Morte Criste,” a hymn. The director noted that hymn singing at the end of a concert was “in the tradition of Male Voice Choirs.”

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14 I was immediately struck by the parallels between the choirs that developed in the mining regions of southern Africa and those developing in similar industries in Wales. Penrhyn was not the only choir to sing this song; I heard this—and also the South African National Anthem—during several MVC observations in 2008 and 2009. The latter is probably well known in North Wales because of the popularity of rugby.

15 I heard this song in many MVC concerts (2008-2009). It is a pop song with English lyrics, written by Brendan Graham and Rolf Lovland. Peer Music, “Brendan Graham,” http://www.peermusic.com/peermusic/index.cfm/artist-writer/artist-details/?artist_id=351 (accessed 23 June 2011). The chorus is melodically similar to a section of “Danny Boy” (i.e., “you raise me up, so I can stand on mountains” is set to “but come ye back, when summer’s in the meadow…”).

16 He also said that singing Welsh songs was great, but that he liked to have some variety in a concert. Since he is from Gwynedd County in the traditional Welsh language heartland, I wondered: was
summer concerts. This document confirms the songs mentioned here and demonstrates the diversity of the choir’s repertoire: a mixture of Welsh and English lyrics, and classical, traditional, and popular styles. However, Penrhyn sang more classical and traditional—and far less popular—selections than many of the MVCs.

Like Llanrwst, the next choir I observed also seemed to value their role as entertainers over more formal singing.17 Côr Meibion y Foel was founded by a woman,18 pianist/conductor Grês Pritchard, who also conducts a local Ladies choir (Owen 2009: 126). She is a schoolteacher who has won music awards in Wales for her piano skills. In 2000, she and a few chapel friends founded y Foel.

“Foel” sounds like “voil” in English, and it means “hill” or “bald” in Welsh, so the compère used the choir’s name in several bald jokes. Two things were immediately obvious: some members of this choir used scores, rather than having all songs memorized, and the conductor was a female, conducting from the piano.19 She was described as being honored with a white robe at the National Eisteddfod for her musical contributions; this description is a reference to her being inducted into the Gorsedd of the Bards.20

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17 This is not a judgment of the quality of singing in these choirs. However, it was obvious that some choirs were meant to be entertaining, while others, although still entertaining, carried themselves with a bit more gravity, and for the latter the repertoire tended to include more challenging works. In other words, some choirs performed more classical repertoire and conducted concerts in a more subdued and serious manner, while others sang many show tunes and other pop songs, and presented themselves in a lighter fashion. I saw Côr Meibion y Foel 21 October 2008.

18 MVCs founded by and/or conducted by women are not uncommon in Northwest Wales. Women are also often accompanists for otherwise all-male choirs.

19 In other words, she was covering both the directing- and the accompanying-duties.
The first song y Foel performed was in English, but it was nationalistic\(^{21}\) (“Wales is My Homeland”). The second was the famous traditional Welsh song “Ar Hyd Yr Nos.” The third was a song about a bridge near the choir’s home on Anglesey: the lyrics were Welsh, but the melody was John Denver’s “Country Roads.” The guest soloist for the evening was not of the choir, but a girl of maybe ten years, all smiles and extremely dramatic. She was introduced as the winner of many prizes in both local and National eisteddfodau. She sang a Welsh song, and then “My Favorite Things” from *The Sound of Music*.

After the soloist, there was a trio in English, another English solo, and then “You Raise Me Up.” This was followed by three—as described by the compère—“Negro spirituals”: “Roll Jordan, Roll,” “My Lord, What a Morning,” and “Hand Me Down My Silver Trumpet,” all sung in English. The second half included a song in Welsh described as “a gypsy chorus,” followed by “Will He Not Come Back Again,” first in Welsh, then in English, followed by “Praise to Wales” in Welsh. After this was a solo in English: “Love Changes Everything”—again a selection from music theater.

After more solos, the choir finished with three “by request” (but from whom, it was not stated): “Myfanwy” (in Welsh), “Calon Lân” (also in Welsh, and described as “the rugby tune”), and “We’ll Leave a Welcome” in English. It seemed that this group sang a lot of songs in English, despite being from Anglesey, where there is a high proportion of Welsh speakers.

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\(^{20}\) I remind the reader that the Gorsedd is a group ritually-honored at the National Eisteddfod since the nineteenth century. It was created in the eighteenth century to promote Wales’ Celtic heritage. The National Eisteddfod of Wales. “Gorsedd of the Bards,” http://www.eisteddfod.org.uk/english/content.php?nID=43 (accessed 17 September 2011).

\(^{21}\) Throughout this dissertation, I use the term “nationalistic” to describe songs that specifically include references to Welsh pride as it is bound up with language and geography.
The fourth choir observed was Côr Meibion Maelgwn (23 October 2008). At this particular concert, they opened with Vivaldi’s “Gloria” in Latin, followed by a Welsh lullaby in Welsh, a cappella. Next, they performed a chorus from The Magic Flute, accompanied by a choir member on organ, and then a Sibelius melody with English lyrics set to it, called “Onwards Ye Peoples.” The soloist, again from outside the choir, was an adult female who plays major roles in various opera companies. She sang a Welsh song to start, but for most of her solos she sang opera arias, including Gluck, and various Italian arias—she came out for two solo sessions in all.

The group continued with a Welsh version of Schubert’s setting of the twenty-third psalm, followed by a song by Dafydd Iwan entitled “The Right to Live.” It was originally in Welsh, but it had been translated into English by Trevor Jones. After this, the choir sang a “Maori love song” set with the lyrics of the traditional Welsh song “Calon Lân.” They finished the half with a spiritual by W.H. Smith called “Ride the Chariots.”

The second half included a selection from a Verdi opera, a Welsh hymn with lyrics based on a William Williams poem, and Richter’s “The Creation” in Welsh. The latter is the same piece I had heard the previous week—described above—but Penrhyn had sung it in English. After the second appearance of the female soloist, Maelgwn sang a song made famous by Sammie Davis, Jr. from Sweet Charity entitled “The Rhythm of

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22 I remind the reader that Maelgwn turned out to be my “local” group; they rehearsed just down the road from where I lived. It is the opinions of Maelgwn singers that comprise the interview information in the previous chapter.

23 I would later learn that she sings with this choir quite often. She might have sung more, but she apologized for having to leave early that particular night because her daughter was singing in a school eisteddfod.

24 This tune was described as such at the concert, and several MVCs sang it. However, details about the melody’s origins are unknown to me.
Life,” but the lyrics were translated into Welsh. Only the previous week, I had heard an MVC perform this in English. The choir followed this with a setting of Dylan Thomas’s “Sunset Poem,” also described as “The Prayer of Reverend Eli Jenkins.” The latter had also been heard in other MVC concerts, but this time the choir was accompanied on organ instead of piano. The final song was a medley of nineteenth-century American songs (in English), a patriotic piece called “The American Trilogy.”

I attended several performances of this choir, including one concert at another nearby chapel. Here, they mostly performed the same set, but with soloists that came from within the choir, instead of visiting singers.25 According to the St. John’s series concert program, Maelgwn’s repertoire26 is listed as follows:

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25 This was a one hundred-year old Church in Wales chapel called St. Andrews in Colwyn Bay. The conductor sang solos at this performance, including a Handel aria. Additionally, two different soloists/members performed one Welsh and then one English hymn tune. The director and one member performed a song by Joseph Parry, and a trio performed “Gwahoddiad.”

26 It should be noted that Maelgwn sang songs not listed above throughout 2008 and 2009. During rehearsals, they worked on several special pieces for specific concerts or competitions. Rehearsals were spent fine-tuning specific songs, with focus on intonation, diction, and other detailed nuances. The choir was often divided into sectionals for rehearsal purposes, and I witnessed intense drilling of certain parts of songs, as opposed to much running through complete pieces. Tonic sol-fa was used for rehearsing, even though many Maelgwn singers use staff notation.
Angels Watching Over Me  O Isis and Osiris
Anthem Galtaidd (Celtic Anthem)  O Gymru
Autumn Leaves  Oleuni Mwyn
Breuddwydio wnes  Pokare Kare Ana
Christus Redemptor (Hyfrydol)  Rhythm y Ddawns (Rhythm of Life)
Close Thine Eyes  Rhywle
Clychau’r Gôg  Ride the Chariot
Cytgan Carcharorion  Salm 23 (Psalm 23)
Cytgan Pererinion  Softly As I Leave You
Deep Harmony  Sunset Poem
Deryn Bwn  Talu’r pris yn liawn
For Your Eyes Only  Testament Rhyddid
Give Me That Old Time Religion  The Creation
Gwahoddiad  There is Nothing Like a Dame
Hafan Gobaith  The Right to Live (yr haw! I fyw)
Hermon  Weimar
Iesu o Nasareth  Y Cennin Aur
Love Changes Everything  Y Sipswyn
Morte Christe  You’ll Never Walk Alone
My Lord, What a Morning  Yr Anthem Geltaidd
Myfanwy

_Maelgwn_ performs with a large but extremely nuanced sound, and consistently appears to reside on the “classical” side of a “popular/entertainment” versus “classical” spectrum. Like _Penrhyn_, they lack the humor and abundance of pop songs performed by other MVCs. Also like _Penrhyn_, they dress more formally. Although they do not wear tuxedos, they do wear complete formal suits as opposed to blazers and more casual pants. Like _Penrhyn_, their conductor is a classically/university-trained singer and conductor. He works not only as a professional musician and adjudicator, but he also owns a bookstore, thus once again blurring the labels—here is a conductor with an additional occupation, even though he may also be aptly labeled a profession musician. _Maelgwn_ is the second-oldest continuous choir providing data for this chapter.  

The final MVC participating in this research was _Côr Meibion Dinbych A’r Cylch_. Like _y Foel, Dinbych_ was founded by a woman, Phyllis Dryhurst-Dodd. She had

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27 As discussed in the previous chapter, they were founded in 1963 as a cerdd dant (harp and poetry) group and became a Male Voice Choir in 1970.
been conducting a mixed group at the North Wales Hospital, but when that institution closed and the choir disbanded, she and some of the members recruited new singers to form the current choir in 1988 (Owen 2009: 90). Dryhurst-Dodd left the group for health reasons in the early part of the new millennium, and was replaced by Arwyn Roberts, one of the choir members and also a Colin Jones singer (Owen 2009: 91).

Like Llanrwst and y Foel, Dinbych performed a lighter, more entertainment-focused concert at St. John’s (28 October 2008). This performance had a notable sectional quality to it; there were exaggerated, terraced effects in both dynamics and tempos throughout the concert.\(^{28}\) My overall impression was “a more crowd-pleasing set.” It was extremely dramatic, and reminiscent of y Foel and Llanrwst in its emphasis on fun and lighter entertainment.

*Dinbych* began with three religious selections in English: “Bless This House,” “Let There Be Peace” and an arrangement of “Abide With Me.” As is typical of many MVCs, the soloist\(^{29}\) sang music theater songs, including “Old Man River,” in English. The choir returned to sing the same Maori song *Maelgwn* had performed (with the Welsh “Calon Lân” lyrics). Afterwards, they sang two American spirituals in English, the first being “Hand Me Down My Silver Trumpet,” which *Côr Meibion y Foel* had also done. Then, the soloist returned for a religious song, also in English. The choir came back with the national anthem of South Africa, which they said “rugby fans would know.” They described this tune as a combination of two songs, one being a black song from and about apartheid: they sang these verses in Zulu. They ended the first half of the concert with a

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\(^{28}\) For instance, the choir abruptly shifted from extremely loud singing to extremely soft singing on several occasions.

\(^{29}\) The soloist, Geraint Roberts, was described as having been “on the circuit” for two years; he later told me he had been singing as a soloist with this choir for about three years, by invitation.
medley of Welsh tunes: “Ar Hyd Yr Nos,” “Dafydd y Garreg Wen,” and “Sospan Fach,” all in Welsh; the latter they described as the South Wales rugby tune. Just before they left the stage, one member and the soloist donned bobby hats and performed a number from a musical, complete with absurd dancing and capering about. Like y Foel and Llanrwst, this choir was distinctive in its role as animated entertainers.

They came back after intermission with the nationalistic “Y Ddau Wladgarwr” (“The Two Patriots”) and then Rogers and Hammerstein’s “Some Enchanted Evening.” The soloist returned for a few dramatic songs, including one from music theater, and another in which he whistled throughout, called “The Blackbird.” The choir followed with “O Gymru” in Welsh, and concluded with a piece that was arranged for their choir specifically—“Rock of Ages,” in Welsh.

It was this group of five MVCs (Côr Meibion Llanrwst Ar Cylch, Côr Meibion y Penrhyn, Côr Meibion y Foel, Côr Meibion Maelgwn, and Côr Meibion Dinbych A’r Cylch) who participated in the surveys presented in this chapter. Repertoire among all five choirs is fairly consistent, with many songs being performed by more than one group, including “Hand Me Down My Silver Trumpet,” “You Raise Me Up,” and the Maori setting of the Calon Lân lyrics, to name a few. Also, some choirs sing more

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30 These surveys reveal which songs represent Welshness for these singers. I had the opportunity to observe two other MVCs: Côr Meibion Dyffryn Peris and Côr Meibion Colwyn, both named for their locations. These two choirs did not participate in surveys—not because of a lack of interest on their part, but simply because I was working on another project and did not have an opportunity to prepare the documents. In fact, I later met a member of Dyffryn Peris—just before I left to return to the US—and he lamented the fact that we had not met sooner, as he was extremely interested in this dissertation. Although these two MVCs are not featured in more detailed description, their repertoire was comparable to that of the choirs discussed above; in fact, many of the same pieces were performed. For example, in my fieldnotes, I noted that Côr Meibion Dyffryn Peris sang Welsh hymns, a couple spirituals in English, a selection by Verdi, “The American Trilogy,” music theater selections, and the South African national anthem.
classical music than the others (e.g., Penrhyn and Maelgwn), but their classical selections included many of the same pieces, including works by Schubert, Vivaldi, and Handel.

Because of so many common pieces among the different choirs—and common styles of pieces: Welsh hymns, music theater numbers, American spirituals—the most notable differences were not exclusively repertoire-driven. Instead, the differences showed in whether or not the group was presenting itself as more formal or as relatively lighter entertainment. Llanrwst, y Foel, and Denbigh added humor to their concerts; however, this did also coincide with the inclusion of more spirituals and numbers from music theater in their sets.

Côr Meibion Penrhyn and Côr Meibion Maelgwn, on the other hand, performed more classical pieces. These two choirs are similar not only because of their largely classical repertoire, but also for their ability to attract a large audience, their formal dress and overall appearance, their history of competitive singing, and their notably “polished” sound.\textsuperscript{31} Also, both are quite a bit larger than the other MVCs: Maelgwn has seventy-eight members and Penrhyn has one-hundred,\textsuperscript{32} as opposed to just forty in y Foel, thirty-six in Denbigh, and twenty-four in Llanrwst.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item This is not to suggest that the other MVCs were less good, but both Penrhyn’s and Maelgwn’s concerts seemed like more formal events. Musically, the latter two groups were solid and clearly well-rehearsed. Between my own observations and the set lists in St. John’s programs, I count eleven pieces that the two choirs have in common. However, as noted elsewhere, these repertoire descriptions are limited, since the choirs also have other pieces not performed at these particular concerts, and the set lists appearing in the St. John’s programs are also incomplete. As such, it may be that there are even more pieces in common between these two choirs’ repertoires. Both Penrhyn and Maelgwn also have classically-trained conductors, though at the present I do not think this is uncommon for MVCs. The distinction between “amateurism” and “professionalism” in MVCs is discussed at length in Chapter V. As noted above, I saw Penrhyn perform at St. John’s on 16 October 2008 and Maelgwn on 23 October 2008. I also observed another concert of Maelgwn’s that autumn in nearby Colwyn Bay, and saw Penrhyn again the following summer.
  \item These numbers come from my observations and the choirs’ websites. Penrhyn lists membership at one-hundred on their website, but photos and observations suggest that this number might be slightly
\end{itemize}
The more serious image of these two choirs may be related to the academic training of their conductors, both of whom have university degrees in music, and have worked in music professionally throughout Wales. However, there is too little information about the other conductors’ training and experience to make any definitive claims. One other Northwest MVC I observed, Côr Meibion Dyffryn Peris, has a conductor who is both a farmer and a politician in addition to his directing duties.

Another example is the conductor of Llanrwst, who in 2008-2009 owned a garage, possibly earning him the label “amateur” rather than “professional” musician. Yet his invitation into the famous Colin Jones choir demonstrates his vocal prowess, and his prior education and training is unknown to me. As such, these distinctions do not appear to be of great significance. However, Maelgwn’s and Penrhyn’s professionalism, along with their other similarities, may be due at least in part to the similar training of their conductors.

Despite these differences, one can conclude that MVC repertoire in the Northwest is fairly uniform, mixing classical choral works with Welsh hymns and other traditional songs, and modern popular—especially music theater—selections. Conductor Trystan Lewis describes the latter as being a relatively new addition, suggesting that only over the past ten years or so have MVCs focused music theater songs. Gareth Williams writes of similar changes to choral repertoire in South Wales beginning in the 1980s (2001: 162). Despite this limited evidence, it appears that the change in repertoire may have come more recently to the Northwest region, which would be consistent with other factors described throughout this dissertation. However, what is notable here is that throughout

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high for actual active membership. Undoubtedly, all choirs fluctuate depending on members’ availability, health, etc. Owen confirms my count of twenty-four for Llanrwst MVC (2009: 149).
Wales, it is now common for MVCs to perform popular songs and music theater selections in addition to classical and traditional pieces.\textsuperscript{33}

Lewis describes MVC repertoire as narrow and somewhat limited compared to Mixed choir repertoire, since MVCs are often dependent on transcriptions from Mixed choir repertoire, or on entirely new compositions for their particular ranges.\textsuperscript{34} This means that MVC repertoire features many common pieces. For example, one staple of this repertoire is “An American Trilogy.” Originally written by American country songwriter Mickey Newbury—Elvis Presley made a famous cover of the song—it was arranged for MVC by Alwyn Humphreys.\textsuperscript{35} Both Côr Meibion Maelgwn and Côr Meibion Dyffryn Peris performed this in 2008 and 2009, and online videos of MVCs singing it are abundant, including performances by the Llanelli MVC, Trelawnyd MVC, and MVCs from Hong Kong and Australia.

It could be argued that MVCs’ repertoire is so unvarying not only because of the relatively limited availability of arrangements for all-male choirs, but also because their venues and audiences are so homogenous. While I cannot speak for all MVC audiences,

\textsuperscript{33} The other Male Voice Choir participating in this research was Only Men Aloud (OMA). The question of whether or not they are a “typical” or “traditional” MVC arises (see Chapter V for a more in-depth discussion). They are also a South Wales choir, and as such they are not entirely relevant to this current discussion. However, their repertoire is in many ways similar to what has just been described. They too mix music theater and pop songs with classical pieces—older and modern, and sing Welsh hymns and other traditional songs.

\textsuperscript{34} Trystan Lewis, interview by author, 15 May 2009, Siop Lyfrau Lewis, digital audio, Llandudno, Conwy, Wales. Most classical choral repertoire is written for a wider range of voices—women and men, and before this (e.g., the Renaissance) boys on the higher parts and men on the lower. MVC music typically includes only tenors, baritones, and basses. It is not a sound most composers have gone for, although there are composers who have written specifically for MVC. But more often than not, the MVCs just sing arrangements of classical music, with the range adjusted to fit their “bottom-heavy” sound.

in Llandudno, the audiences are primarily holiday-makers from other parts of the UK—mostly English visitors. These audiences are mostly elderly, similar in age to the MVC members themselves. Even the two Only Men Aloud audiences I observed were mostly over age 60, even though the singers in this choir range in age from 19 to early 40s. It should be restated that Llandudno is a well-known retirement community and popular seaside resort; therefore, it is not surprising that audiences there would be elderly. However, it is notable that a young MVC like Only Men Aloud would have a mostly-elderly audience even in Liverpool.

Older audiences appear to be the norm for MVC performances. These audiences have come to expect a certain repertoire, and theater songs in particular are clearly among the most popular. Thus, the preferences of the typical MVC audience, coupled with the limited number of pieces arranged for all-male choir, ensure a similar set list for most MVCs in Northwest Wales. This repertoire is markedly different from that of the Mixed choir presented below, but somewhat similar to that of the Youth choir Glanaethwy. The following section features histories and repertoire of these and other choirs who participated in surveys, the data from which appears at the end of this chapter.

36 In fact, my first attempt at fieldwork was speaking with audience members who sat directly behind me at the Llanrwst MVC concert at St. John’s (14 October 2008); coincidently, the three sitting directly behind me were three of only four or five Welsh people in attendance that night! I learned this as I made my way around the church, asking audience members if they would mind participating in a short survey. “We are just visiting” became so frequent that I thought people were really just uninterested, but some told me specifically where they were from. Later during the concert, the compère asked visitors from various places to raise their hands: there were 2 in the front from the Isle of Man, about 5-7 Scottish people, 4-5 Welsh, and the rest English—out of a crowd of at least 75, but possible more. After so many raised their hands when he asked who was from “England,” he started naming specific regions within England.

37 Only Men Aloud does have more young fans than the other MVCs I observed, which is apparent on the group’s Facebook page. However, I was surprised to find mostly older fans at these two live shows. The show in Llandudno on 29 April 2009 was sold out, but I was able to go into the hall and observe and speak to audience members before the concert started. This is also where I met conductor Tim Rhys-Evans and set up the interview, which I conducted at the show on 6 May 2009 in Liverpool. For the latter I was able to attend the dress rehearsal and performance.
As noted previously, there were many more opportunities to observe MVCs than there were to see Ladies, Mixed, or Youth choirs during my fieldwork. However, the Mixed and Youth choirs interviewed for the previous chapter also participated in the surveys presented at the end of this chapter. Additionally, another Youth choir (Côr Ieuennid Môn) and a Ladies choir (Côr Merched Bro Nest) also participated in surveys. As in the previous section, a short history, followed by a brief discussion of repertoire—where available—is presented for each choir.38

_Côr Ieuennid Môn_ is a Youth choir, ranging in age from 7 to 16.39 As with _Côr Merched Bro Nest_, my minimal observations did not yield a comprehensive view of their repertoire, and there are not any documents that list this information (such as the St. John’s programs for the MVCs). I did, however, learn a bit about their repertoire from four of the oldest members of the choir, female teenagers ranging in age from 14 to 16.40

In general, these teenagers expressed pride in their Welsh-language repertoire and the modern Welsh classical compositions they learn for competitions. For this competition in particular, they performed “Y Dryw Bach Drwg” by Gareth Glyn and “Ail

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38 The female singers in this dissertation come primarily from mixed-sex choirs (both adult and youth), with the exception of _Côr Merched Bro Nest_, which is an all-female adult choir. “Merched” means “women/ladies,” and Bro Nest refers to a historical/legendary figure named Princess Nest, the “daughter of a Celtic leader” according to the program of the North Wales Choral Festival (2008). Although they did eagerly participate in the surveys and many spoke with me at this event, this brief encounter did not yield a comprehensive view of their repertoire. However, their choices for songs representing Welshness are presented in the following section, tallied with those of the other adult female singers in this research.

39 This group was the winner in the “Youth Section” at the North Wales Choral Competition in 2008. I was able to observe their competition as well as their evening concert performance, in addition to speaking with a few members during the day.

40 These teens are included separately in the previous chapter’s interview data because they did not want to participate in individual interviews: they would only talk in the presence of one another, which mostly meant that one spoke, and the others agreed. However, each did fill in her own survey individually and these are included in this chapter’s data.
Feilin” by Caryl Parry Jones, while all three of the other Youth choirs at the competition—one Irish and two from Wales—performed both of their songs in English. One of the girls said: “Did you see how we were the only ones singing in Welsh? At competitions we are usually the only ones.” Another explained that singing Welsh-language music was a choice that “shows our Welshness.”

Undoubtedly, their location within Wales (i.e., the island of Anglesey) may contribute to their abundance of Welsh-language repertoire. Having witnessed their post-victory meeting, I noted that this choir was composed of fluent Welsh speakers—all announcements and conversations were in Welsh. On the other hand, Côr Meibion y Foel also hails from Anglesey and members spoke in Welsh to one another: yet, as discussed above, they sing a large number of songs in English. These differences most likely reflect the needs of the audiences and the venues: the children are competing in Welsh music competitions, the men are entertaining largely English audiences who have come to expect show tunes.

The repertoire of the other Youth choir in this dissertation, Ysgol Glanaethwy, also includes many Welsh-language selections. Like that of the MVCs, it includes a mixture of old and new classical pieces—some in new arrangements, Welsh and English traditional songs, and popular and theatrical numbers. While Glanaethwy differs in

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41 Obviously, one could hardly generalize about Youth singers in Northwest Wales based on this one conversation. However, to these participants, Welshness seemed to be bound up with language ability. One of the factors that set them apart from the older singers was their background in music, which also made their responses in line with results from the Youth choir featured more prominently in this dissertation, Ysgol Glanaethwy. They explained that although they have sung in plenty of chapels, the chapels themselves “are not the main point.” When I inquired as to what they meant by this, they all explained how churches are common places to do concerts, but these concerts are not religious. Finally, there was one other point on which they agreed with many of the MVC participants: Welsh music is all about the lyrics. The girls said that Welsh songs tend to tell a story, and that it is the stories and the feelings that are essential to Welsh music.
image from some of the other Northwest choirs,\textsuperscript{42} they share the same variety of classical, traditional, and popular styles, and the same variety of languages, though their repertoire features Welsh, prominently. The following list shows the tracks on their two commercial albums:

\textit{O Fortuna (2008)}

\begin{itemize}
    \item O Fortuna (Carmina Burana) - Youth Choir
    \item Circle of Life (Lion King) - Youth Choir
    \item Dyrchefir Fi (You Raise Me Up) - Junior Choir
    \item Dwed Wrthym Pam (Magdalen) - Youth Choir
    \item And All That Jazz (Chicago) - Youth Choir
    \item Dansi Na Kuimba - Junior Choir
    \item Y Clwb Jazz - Youth Choir
    \item Dal i Gredu - Junior Choir
    \item Try a Little Tenderness - Youth Choir
    \item Yfory - Junior Choir
    \item Er Hwylíð o'r Haul - Youth Choir
    \item Cerddaf y Strydoedd Tywyl (Seren Newydd) - Junior Choir
    \item Adiemus (Songs of Sanctuary) - Youth Choir
    \item Iesu Yw (3,2,1) - Youth & Junior Choirs
\end{itemize}

\textit{Rhapsodi (2010)}

\begin{itemize}
    \item Eyr Pengwern (Glanaethwy)
    \item Son of a Preacher Man (Da Capo)
    \item Yr Hedydd (Glanaethwy)
    \item Rhythm y Ddawns (Glanaethwy)
    \item Alaw Mair (Glanaethwy)
    \item You've Got a Friend (Da Capo)
    \item Italian Salad (Glanaethwy)
    \item Un Nos Ola Leuad (Da Capo)
    \item The Way Old Friends Do (Glanaethwy)
    \item Y Nos yng Nghaer Arianrhod (Da Capo)
    \item Bohemian Rhapsody (Glanaethwy)
\end{itemize}

Although these albums include an abundance of pop music, \textit{Glanaethwy} also performs classical repertoire. However, what is missing from \textit{Glanaethwy}’s repertoire—yet is central to the MVCs’—is the abundance of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century “traditional” songs. \textit{Glanaethwy} sings some (e.g., “Cwm Rhondda”), but not several.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{42} Their image is different particularly because they use choreography. See the following chapter for details.
While we did not talk at length about repertoire, Glanaethwy’s co-founder/director Cefin Roberts explained the necessities of being adaptable with respect to repertoire, particularly concerning the choir’s native language, Welsh.

For instance, the choir was unable to sing 80% of its repertoire for the BBC’s Last Choir Standing competition, but Roberts suggests that this is to be expected in any competition.\textsuperscript{43} Thus, like all the choirs in this dissertation, Glanaethwy’s performing and competing schedule shapes its repertoire choices. Required styles and pieces are simply part of choral life. Having attended rehearsals and a concert in Llandudno (21 June 2009), in addition to reviewing their albums, I would argue that Glanaethwy’s repertoire is not unlike that of the MVCs in this dissertation: a mixture of classical, traditional, and pop songs, in both English and in Welsh. The most notable difference is that they seem to focus less on what could be called MVC traditional “favorites”: eighteenth- and nineteenth-century songs like “Myfanwy,” “Calon Lân,” and “Ar Hyd y Nos.”

The final choir, Côr Cymysg Dyffryn Conwy (the Conwy Valley Mixed Choir),\textsuperscript{44} differs from all the choirs mentioned above because it was formed for a completely different purpose with respect to repertoire: the group was created to perform oratorio exclusively. Conductor Trystan Lewis, who also conducts Maelgwn MVC, notes the predominance of good sight-readers in this choir, “be it sol-fa or staff,” which allows him to “undertake the works of the masters.”\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{43} This televised competition will be discussed in detail in Chapter V. Roberts said: “Every competition you go to, they do have their little goalposts and you just have to aim for that.” All quotations from Cefin Roberts come from my interview with him, unless otherwise noted. Cefin and Rhian Roberts, interview by author, 21 June 2009, Debenhams Cafe, digital audio, Llandudno, Conwy, Wales.

\textsuperscript{44} I was able to attend both their Christmas concert (2008) and their Easter concert (2009) during my year in Wales. I also attended weekly rehearsals; adult, female interviewees featured in the previous chapter come from Conwy.
For Christmas, Conwy performed Haydn’s *Lord Nelson Mass*, Vaughn-Williams’ *Serenade to Music*, and excerpts from Handel’s *Messiah*, but Handel’s lyrics had been translated into Welsh. This concert also featured two carols: “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” and “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” each sung with alternating English- and Welsh-language verses. Earlier in December, they were hired to perform in Pwllheli, a small village approximately forty-five miles south of Conwy. Here they performed their usual classical repertoire as well as traditional Welsh-language hymns, the latter as requested by those staging the concert. Conwy spent the second half of the year on Easter repertoire, which included Fauré’s *Requiem* and John Stainer’s *Crucifixion*.

These two major concerts both included guest soloists. For the first, the choir was accompanied by a local orchestra, the North Wales Philharmonia, while in the second it was accompanied by a guest organist. Although the choir does not compete, which prevents the singers from having to learn certain required pieces, Conwy does occasionally perform in a concert that requires songs outside their usual repertoire, like the Pwllheli example above. However, unlike the MVCs and *Glanaethwy*, they do not sing pop or theater repertoire. With respect to repertoire, they are closest to descriptions of choirs from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, because they have not adopted the predilection to sing popular music and show tunes as the others have. However, even those turn-of-the-century choirs were sometimes accused of adopting

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46 Several Conwy singers expressed frustration about this, suggesting that the English words “fit better.” While there were two few examples to make any claims, these singers implied that the use of their native language was less important than what they perceived as the better arrangement.

47 The choir meets fall through spring and is off in the summers.
limited, “vulgar” popular repertoire, so it appears that the issue is not a new one in Wales.⁴⁸

All of the choir types created in the late nineteenth century (MVC, Ladies, Mixed, and Youth) are present in Wales today. All give concerts and some also compete. Despite differences in how much or how little they focus on challenging material or lighter pieces, repertoire among MVCs in Northwest Wales is somewhat in line with what young groups like the all-male Only Men Aloud and the mixed-sex Glanaethwy are singing. On the other hand, mixed groups like Conwy sing a repertoire of mostly classical works, similar to historical accounts of choirs from Wales’ past. The variety of styles sung by Northwest Wales’ choirs demonstrates that Welsh choirs are not defined by one particular style of music or one small set of pieces. Thus, rather than a distinctively Welsh style of singing or even repertoire—although Welsh-language repertoire of various styles would be the exception⁴⁹—what is distinctively Welsh is more about contexts for choral singing, and the ubiquity of choral singing in Wales. It should be emphasized that it is not necessary for music or musical activities to be unique to a culture. Instead, what is important is that the identity-creators have linked the signs with their own sense of cultural distinctiveness.

⁴⁸ See the following chapter for further discussion.

⁴⁹ Welsh songs and hymns with Welsh or English lyrics from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are what are typically called “traditional” music in Wales. In North America, hymns in particular are associated with Welshness (see Chapter VI for details).
Collecting the Data

With such a variety of song styles performed by these choirs, I became interested in how repertoire might be involved in the singers’ perceptions of their own Welsh cultural identity. I asked singers to choose a song that best represents their own Welshness. As both identity and musical meanings are highly personal, I fully expected a great variety of answers. Moreover, it was never my intention to generalize meaningfulness of songs based on just 85 survey participants. Instead, I wondered what patterns might emerge among singers of different sexes and generations.

I also wondered what it was about a song that made it a good sign of Welshness. How much did certain factors (e.g., language of the lyrics, the first language of the singer) contribute to song choices? The following section details my findings, focusing on specific songs perceived as Welsh signs by singers. Only volunteers from the following choirs participated in these surveys: Côr Meibion Maelgwn, Côr Meibion y Foel, Côr Meibion Dinbych A’r Cylch, Côr Meibion Llanrwst Ar Cylch, and Côr Meibion y Penrhyn (MVCs); Côr Merched Bro Nest (Ladies); Côr Cymysg Dyffryn Conwy (Mixed); Ysgol Glanaethwy and Côr Ieuenctid Môn (Youth).

The primary function of this survey was to determine which songs were seen as signs of Welshness,\textsuperscript{50} and specifically what about these songs made them so. In addition

\textsuperscript{50} As in all of my fieldwork experiences, I discovered new questions and better methods as my research progressed. As such, my survey changed slightly in the first few months of work. For instance, the first version I created included a space for the respondents’ first choice as well as for four others (second, third, fourth, and fifth choices for songs that best signify Welshness). However, no one filled in that many choices, and the page was over-crowded, which required a small font that was especially troublesome for the elderly participants. Therefore, I shortened it to just first, second, and third choices. In order to have consistent data, I am only including the first song choice in my quantitative analysis. Some
to the song that best signifies “Welshness,” singers were asked about reason(s) for their choice(s). The choices were as follows, and they were free to choose as few or as many as they liked: A) evokes personal memories, B) what the lyrics are about, C) the composer/songwriter, D) the performer(s), E) the language of the lyrics, F) importance to my family, G) other (the latter included a space for them to explain their choice). In sum, the surveys show the song that best represents Welshness for each individual (song title, composer, and performer), the reasons for the singer’s song choice, and the singer’s age, sex, birthplace, and native language. Using both qualitative and quantitative analyses, I discuss the results and suggest how sociohistorical factors may have contributed to these data.

*The Importance of Lyrics in the Data*

Music can be involved in semiosis without the use of language (Turino 1999: 227, 235). Other studies show measurable physiological effects that instrumental music can have on a listener. Because researchers are often concerned with studying music’s

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51 All surveys also asked for the composer and performer of the song, and the singer’s sex, age, birthplace, and language ability; for the latter, the choices were native Welsh speaker, non-Welsh speaker, and someone who is a native speaker of English and has learned—or is learning—Welsh. Some versions of the survey also included questions about their singing background, whether or not the choir has any unique songs in its repertoire, and how they describe themselves—Welsh, British, etc. Such minor changes to the survey’s brief biographical section did not prove to be relevant to this chapter. Once again, only questions used across all surveys are being compared here. All versions of the survey may be found in Appendix B.

52 For example, Menon and Levitin (2005) found that ancient areas of the brain, involved in vital functions, are activated by music, much in the same way they are activated by food, sex, and certain drugs. The music in this experiment was instrumental music chosen by the participants themselves, and it resulted
meaningfulness without confounding interference from linguistic meaningfulness, most studies focus exclusively on instrumental music (cf. Patel 2008). This leaves several important questions. For instance, does music with lyrics have more power because of the added dimension of lyrical meaning? Does the music amplify or enhance the lyrics in some way? And if it does, how or why does it have that power?

Thompson and Russo (2004) attempted to address these gaps in the research on music and meaning by creating a set of experiments that found evidence for a powerful relationship between music and lyrics. They found that music enhances the emotional quality of lyrics, that listeners rate familiar lyrics as more meaningful when they hear them being sung as opposed to hearing them being spoken, and that repeated exposure to a song increases the perceived meaningfulness of the lyrics (2004: 59-61). Thus, it appears that music may enhance lyrics in perceptions of musical meaning. Moreover, the role of being familiar with the songs and/or lyrics may suggest the power of association and memory in musical meaning.

It has already been noted that several MVC participants view poetic words as a sign of Welshness, whether these words appear in conversation, poetry, prose, or song. Obviously, there is nothing inherently Welsh about the meaningfulness of lyrics, or about singers focusing on words. However, historical associations between bards and

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53 The first experiment showed that listeners rated lyrics as more emotionally happy or sad if the lyrics were set to music, as opposed to being spoken. From this, Thompson and Russo surmise that “music can sometimes affect a listener’s interpretation of the emotional connotation of verbal information.” This is in line with studies on soundtracks influencing viewers’ interpretations of films. In the second experiment, they found that with familiar songs, lyrics were judged as more meaningful if they were set to music than if they were merely spoken, although this was not so with unfamiliar songs. Their third experiment showed that repeated “background” exposure—playing songs five times while the participants read magazines or books—also produced an increase in perceived meaningfulness.
Welshness—including the tradition of poetic recitation at eisteddfodau—have created and strengthened connections between poetry and Welshness for some. It could be passion for the Welsh language itself that fuels this sign, or it may be that perceiving Welsh culture as a particularly poetic one might cause some Welsh-speaking Welsh people to further emphasize their language. In either case, the eisteddfod has undoubtedly contributed to the continued use of poetry as a sign of Welshness, much as it has done for choral singing.

Importantly, all signs of identity are products of an individual’s personal experiences. Meaning in music—with or without lyrics—is also largely dependent on episodic (or autobiographical) memory (cf. Cross 2008). The MVC participants featured in this chapter may support this argument by having chosen songs as signs of Welshness that have no lyrical references to Wales or the Welsh language. One might surmise then that these choices reflect associations based on personal experience with the song, rather than on primarily linguistic cues.

What is notable for this discussion is a song’s ability to activate cognitive models both linguistically and non-linguistically. In addition to lyrics, other cues—e.g., pitch, rhythm—are also involved in this process (cf. Levitin 2008). When one also considers that the musical context may be imbuing the words with added power, perhaps through the presence of multiple cues, it is clear how the process allows an individual to make

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54 American journalist Cindy Mindell marvels at the Crowning of the Bard Ceremony at the National Eisteddfod, which she attended in 2009. She likens the event to an American concert featuring a major rock star, including crowds pushing to get in, Jumbotron screens, extensive lighting, and television crews. The only difference is that the featured artist at this ceremony is a poet. Cindy Mindell, “An American in Bala,” BBC: Wales, 4 August 2009. http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/northwest/sites/eisteddfod/pages/cindymindell.shtml (accessed 7 July 2011).
particularly strong associations between songs and concepts in memory. It is no surprise then that in cultural identity, music—particularly with lyrics—is such a common marker.

Because of lyrics’ abilities to strongly guide musical meaning, I chose lyrical content as the distinguishing factor for the category “song type.” In other words, to analyze singers’ choices I used one of the following five distinguishing characteristics for the songs: nationalistic (in this case, meaning there are specific references made to Welsh language and/or geography), religious, nationalist and religious (combined), love songs, and not determined, meaning the song only appeared once in the data; only songs occurring two or more times were analyzed for lyrical meaning for this part of the dissertation.

**Analyzing the Data**

I start by acknowledging that it is ineffective to try to generalize singers’ responses. Instead, included here are qualitative observations, as well as hypotheses about the role of sociohistorical factors in patterns found. Quantitative analyses were conducted in order to provide empirical support for patterns in the data. This was achieved with the computer software *SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), Version 17*, which provides statistical analyses of quantitative data in psychology and

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55 My original plan was to categorize the songs by three types: classical, traditional, and popular. However, it is well known that these categories do not have clear-cut distinctions. More specifically, in this research I found that many song choices were “traditional” songs—hymns, for instance, that people described as “traditional” to me in conversation—but they were choosing versions that had been arranged into elaborate four-part arrangements by classically-trained musicians. As such, I felt that these categories were not accurate labels to try and make distinctions within this repertoire. I also stress that the category of song type—much like age, sex, and language—is merely used to determine correlations among the data, from which I can suggest (but not prove) causalities.
linguistics. Although it may not be conventional to use such measures in ethnomusicological writings, it is the widely accepted means of looking at the relationships of specific variables in the social sciences.

Two statistical tests were used to analyze the data. The first test, Kendall’s tau, tests for reliable associations between variables or factors; this is a test of correlation (i.e., when one variable is present, another is reliably present also). In other words, Kendall’s tau compares each set of two variables—e.g., birthplace and song type—to see if they are related. The second test, an ANOVA, shows differences in the effects of “predictor” variables (e.g., age, sex) on “outcome variables,” and reasons why the song is such an effective sign of Welshness. The result of an ANOVA is a probability that that can indicate whether one factor is affecting another, even if all other variables are removed.

Correlations in the Data

Andy Field describes correlational research as a means of analyzing data “so as to look at relationships between naturally occurring variables rather than making statements about cause and effect” (2009: 783). In the present research, I cannot say definitively that being a certain age causes one to choose, for example, lyrical meaning as what makes a song a sign of Welshness. Instead, Kendall’s tau shows whether or not age and choice of lyrical meaning reliably co-occur with one another. Then, I can interpret this relationship

56 I am once again indebted to Phillip Hamrick for his help with the statistics in this section, and also for running the program.

57 See Appendix C for details on how these tests were set up.

58 If the probability is 0.05 or lower, then it means the likelihood that the results are due to chance is less than 5%. This level is the industry standard in psychology and most other social sciences.
and make suggestions about why it exists.\textsuperscript{59} Using this type of analysis shows patterns and tendencies among the singers’ responses in a quantitative fashion. In other words, a Kendall’s tau shows which factors change in tandem with one another.

The Kendall’s tau revealed some notable, statistically-significant correlations in these data. For example, younger participants were less likely than adults were to choose themselves as the performer of the songs they chose.\textsuperscript{60} One possible explanation for this finding is that the adults have had more time and experience with their own Welshness. This includes more singing experiences and more experience with simply being Welsh, and presumably more time to create associations between the two. I suspect that is why putting themselves into a song as the performer would make the song a better representation of Welshness.

The role of personal experience is unlikely to be limited to participants’ choice of performer. The songs themselves also reflect singers’ personal experiences. For instance, it is likely that love songs like “Myfanwy” are signs of Welshness, not because of lyrical content, but rather through associations—e.g., personal and/or family experiences of hearing and/or singing the song, knowledge that this melody is a product of the famous Welsh nineteenth-century musician Joseph Parry. Evidence for this comes from the fact that no correlations were found between the choice of love song and reasons

\textsuperscript{59} The difference between correlation and causation is well known in scientific studies. For instance, Chapin et al. 2010 found that enhanced emotion and reward/pleasure activity in the brain in response to music correlated with the listener being a musician. However, they recognize that this does not necessarily mean that being a musician causes one to have enhanced physiological reactions. It could be that instead, having more enhanced neural responses to music causes one to pursue music in the first place. Their results show a relationship, and this relationship can be interpreted in multiple ways. Likewise, I stress that ultimately I am making interpretations (cf. Geertz 1973: 14), and these statistical tests are used simply as a starting point and as support for my speculations.

\textsuperscript{60} The Kendall’s tau showed a correlation between age and performer (self or other) of .26 ($p < .05$). In terms of my data, this meant that adults were significantly more likely to choose themselves as performers of their chosen songs than were the younger participants.
“B” (lyrical content) or “E” (language of the lyrics). Thus, there was no quantitative relationship between either B or E and love songs.

However, lyrical content and the language of the lyrics (B and E) did correlate with the choice of nationalistic and religious songs. This indicates that when singers chose nationalistic and religious songs as signs of Welshness, they were most likely doing so because of the message in the lyrics; perhaps the use of Welsh for this message may imbue it with additional Welshness. In sum, the importance of lyrical content and the language of the lyrics appear to selectively co-occur with preferences for nationalistic and religious songs, while preference for love songs may be more associated with other factors.61

Further correlation tests revealed no significant correlations between birthplace, language ability, and song types or reasons. However, a review of the data reveals that the few participants born in England all chose Welsh-language titles, a mix of love songs (including “Myfanwy”), traditional hymns and other religious songs (e.g., “Calon Lân,” “Gwahoddiad”) and nationalistic selections (the national anthem). Conversely, a couple of Welsh-born, native Welsh speakers chose non Welsh-language songs, including “Wales is my Homeland” and “Christus Redemptor.” This may reflect a connection between the Welsh language and Welshness for those not born in Wales. Moreover, most of the Welsh-born participants were also native speakers, so it is not surprising that Welsh-language songs might most-often best represent their own individual Welshness.

61 There is also evidence that these song choices are specific to different age groups, as supported by the ANOVA test (described below). The Kendall’s tau showed a significant relationship between being female and choosing B (what the lyrics are about), but crucially, this finding overlaps with the finding that age and B were also related. Therefore, the fact that the young choir was mostly female makes it unclear whether the relationships between age and the choice of B, and sex and the choice of B, are due more to age, sex, or some other common factor. While the data are inconclusive, it may be that the young singers are more likely to base musical meaning on lyrical meanings.
Other Important Findings

In order to test if certain variables affected others, an ANOVA was conducted. The results of the ANOVA showed a main effect of age on song type. This means that even with all other factors—sex, birthplace, language abilities—removed or kept constant, there were significant differences between participants of different ages, and the types of songs they chose. This is not entirely surprising to a qualitative researcher, since a mere glance at the data reveals an abundance of nationalistic songs among the teenagers. However, the ANOVA provides empirical support for the claim that some variables (e.g., age) lead to significant differences in others (e.g., song type). Specifically, young singers chose nationalistic songs, and most MVC singers chose love songs, primarily the nineteenth-century love song “Myfanwy.”

See the figure below for details:

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62 The ANOVA was used because there were more than two variables (there were many different songs). This test showed reliable, significant differences between the age groups and the type of songs they chose to signify Welshness \((F(3, 76) = 3.89, p < .05)\).
Figure 22. Percentage of song types chosen by each age group. Note that nationalistic songs constitute approximately 93% of the choices of the participants under the age of 20, with the remaining choices being nationalistic and religious. Nationalistic songs decrease with age, and the choice of love songs also increases with age, peaking at around 46% for participants in the 60+ group. Among the latter, only 14% chose nationalistic songs, while 32% chose religious songs. Religious songs are barely represented in the data for the teenagers: religious songs only account for 7% of the under-20 data, and all of these were songs in which the religious lyrics are in combination with nationalistic lyrics.

Figure 22 shows that nationalistic songs dominate the choices of younger participants, while love songs are the most common song signs of Welshness to older participants. The lack of religious songs among the teen responses could reflect the general drop in chapel participation among the younger generations. Likewise, love songs (like “Myfanwy”) are nineteenth-century favorites that are now widely considered “traditional”; importantly, these are typically not part of the teenagers’ individual or choral experiences of Welshness. While the adults, particularly in MVCs, have sung
“Myfanwy” in choirs all their lives, the teens sing an array of newer compositions and very few of these old songs.63

Most of the young singers chose the national anthem. Dai Griffiths describes such songs as “highly coded.” I read his use of “code” in a semiotic sense, as a system for correlating, organizing, and understanding meanings.64 In other words, songs like the national anthem are more “obvious” in their meanings; that is, they have a more precise and shared meaning because of similar contexts and functions associated with them. Therefore, not only are the lyrics a call for pride toward and defense of the Welsh language, the fact that the song functions as the national anthem gives it additional meanings because of its uses and contexts.65 Thus, given their more overt and ubiquitous meanings, nationalistic songs may be more salient to the teens, whose lesser experience with Welshness may not allow for them to have made other associations between their cultural identity and specific songs. This connecting of songs to feelings of Welshness would presumably be a product of age and experience, through the building of more complex cognitive models. This may explain why younger singers might choose more “obvious” songs.

The reader may recall these teenage participants’ inclusive sense of Welshness, in which they absolutely do not view Welshness by degrees, nor do they see Welshness as

63 The few teens who did see some people as possibly more Welsh than others used MVCs as examples, explaining that they might be “more Welsh” because of their repertoire of nineteenth-century songs. However, they do not see MVC’s typical repertoire as the ones that best represent Welshness. Instead, they chose nationalistic songs.


65 In Chapter I, I have already discussed how song meaning is still affected by personal experiences; even so-called “highly coded” songs would be subject to these individual interpretations. Still, the Welsh national anthem is clearly about the struggle to preserve the Welsh language, and its specific role as Wales’ national anthem also makes it a more obvious choice.
something that can be judged or compared. This may at first seem to be at odds with their highly nationalistic—and thus, relatively exclusive—song choices. In fact, in addition to the national anthem, another nationalistic number-one song among this group is Welsh language activist/politician/musician Dafydd Iwan’s “Yma O Hyd” (“Here Still,” 1983). Even more notably, the song was chosen six additional times as second or third choices among the twelve surveys completed by Glanaethwy singers. The lyrics to both the national anthem (“Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau”) and “Yma O Hyd” are presented below (with English translations):66

HEN WLAD FY NHADAU
Mae hen wlad fy nhadau yn annwyl i mi,
Gwlad beirdd a chantorion, enwogion o fri;
Ei gwrol ryfelwyr, gwladgarwyr tra mâd,
Tros ryddid gollasant eu gwaed.

Gwlad, Gwlad, pleidiol wyf i’i gwlad.
Tra môr yn fur i'r bur hoff bau,
O bydded i'r hen iaith ba rhau.

LAND OF MY FATHERS
The ancient land of my fathers is dear to me,
A land of poets and minstrels, famed men,
Her brave warriors, patriot much blessed,
It was for freedom that they lost their blood
Homeland! I am devoted to my country;
So long as the sea is a wall to this fair beautiful land
May the ancient language remain.

YMA O HYD
Dwyt ti’i m yn cofio Macsen, does neb yn ei nabod o
Mae mil a chwe chant o flynyddoedd yn amser rhy hir i’r co'
Aeth Magnus Maximus o Gymru yn y flwyddyn tri chant wyth tri
A’n gadael yn genedl gyfan, a heddiw - wele ni!

Chorus:
Ryn ni yma o hyd! Ryn ni yma o hyd!
Er gwaetha pawb a phopeth (x3)
Ryn ni yma o hyd!

Chwythed y gwynt o'r dwyrain, rhued y storm o'r môr
Hollted y melt yr wybren a gwaedded y daran encôr
Llifed dagrau'r gwangalon a llyfed y taeog y llawr
Er dued y fagddu o'n cwmpas, ry'n ni'n barod am doriad y wawr!

Cofiwn i Facsen Wledig adael ein gwlad yn un darn
A bloeddiwn gerbron y gwledydd 'Byddwn yma hyd Ddydd y Farn!'"n
Er gwaetha pob Di Siôn Dafydd, er gwaethaf y gelyn a'i griw,
Byddwn yma hyd ddiweddd amser, a bydd yr iaith Gymraeg yn fyw!

HERE STILL
You don't remember Macsen, who was he? You don't know
One thousand and six hundred years is far, far too long ago.
When Magnus Maximus left Wales three eighty three was the year
He left us as a nation, and today – we are still here!

Chorus:
We're still here today! We're still here today
Despite everything and everyone (x3)
We're still here today.

Let the wind blow from the East, let the storm from the sea roar
Let the sky split with lightning, let thunderbolts shout encore.
Let the faint-hearted keep wailing, let the serfs grovel and fawn
In spite of the darkness around us, we're ready to greet a new dawn.

Remember that old Prince Macsen, left our country as one
Let's shout out to all the nations 'We'll be here until Kingdom come!'
Despite all the collaborators, despite “the old enemy” we're alive
We'll be here for ever and ever, and the Welsh language will survive!

Rather than a contradiction between what might be seen as inclusive Welshness represented by exclusive songs, I suggest that the teens’ choices demonstrate the effects and influence of their historical and geographical place. These teens were born after the intensive language struggles that secured Welsh-language education and Welsh-language popular media in Wales. They have never lived during a time when Welsh language
legislation was not a part of their country’s political or social life. It follows that they would see songs in which the lyrics explicitly describe this issue as representing Welshness.

Furthermore, this identity is not something that they have had to defend like the older singers have had to do. They live in what has historically been the Welsh-language “heartland,” and as such they are surrounded by Welsh speakers. Being teens, they also have not interacted as much with “outsiders”—people who do not share their Welshness in some ways. The similarity of their experiences—including where they have lived and when they have lived—coupled with their youth, means they have had less experience than the adults living as Welsh people and contemplating and/or articulating Welshness. This may explain why the Glanaethwy answers were so similar and also so nationalistic.

Despite age being related to specific song types, the two most often chosen reasons for why a song represents Welshness across all age groups were B, what the lyrics are about, and E, the language of the lyrics. This could be due to the fact that language—in this case, lyrics—provides more specified access to concepts, and as such, it guides musical meaning more directly than instrumental music. At the very least, lyrics provide an additional layer of cues in the brain, imposing a fluid—but still guided—meaning to the song. The salience of choice “E” (the language of the lyrics; in other words, the lyrics being in Welsh) further demonstrates the importance of the Welsh language as a sign of Welshness in Northwest Wales, despite differences in age.

Notably, older singers chose a greater variety of reasons than younger singers did. These included A, evokes personal memories, C, the composer/songwriter, and F, importance to my family. Although abundant among the older singers’ answers, these
reasons were barely represented in data from the youngest group. Once again, this may reflect richer, more complex cognitive models of Welshness among the older singers, which is in line with the interview data: the latter revealed few recognized signs of Welshness among the Youth responses, and the oldest singers’ stated signs were the most varied and the most plentiful.

The data also reveal a notable pattern of singers including themselves as the performer for their song choices. These responses support the emphasis on individual experience and its centrality in cultural identity, put forth throughout this dissertation. Of the 66% of singers who filled in a performer or performers with their song choices, 71% wrote something that referred to themselves; answers included “our choir,” “us,” etc. Undoubtedly, being the performer of a song gives it added significance and enhances the experience of that particular song, making it more of an identity marker than a song that an individual has not sung him/herself. It could be that in performing the song, singers are in part performing their own Welshness, as well as their own identity as a singer in a choir. It has already been shown that a significant correlation was found between age and the choice of self-as-performer, supporting the observations that choosing oneself as the performer is much more common among the adults than among the teenagers. Once again, this might be explained by considering the much more plentiful and varied experiences of adult singers, who have repeatedly associated their own performances with their own Welsh identities.

In sum, although all Welshness is abstract, it is built from experiences. As such, the teens’ versions of Welshness might be more traditionally defined because they have fewer personal experiences for use in their cognitive models. The teens see MVCs and
their nineteenth-century songs as traditional, and thus—as some of them suggested—“probably” the most Welsh, if there could be such a concept. However, the teens chose nationalistic songs with lyrical content and the medium of the Welsh language as signs of their own Welshness. For their entire lives, discussions of Welshness have been bound up with language issues; therefore, it is not surprising that they might choose songs with lyrics explicitly about this subject. While the adults’ Welshness with regard to songs often includes themselves as the performers, the teens’ choices reflect perhaps less personal, and more traditional and “highly coded” indexes. This data set suggests that the teens’ minimal experience with Welshness gives them a strikingly traditional discourse of Welshness. The older singers, on the other hand, have ample experience connecting specific songs to other signs, all of which give rise to feelings of Welshness. As such, they rarely chose the highly-coded songs so prevalent among the teens’ responses.

One notable aspect of the teenagers’ experiences of Welshness is the importance of popular media, which since they have been alive has included Welsh-language components. More importantly, it has been central to language legislation and to most of the language and Welshness discussions in Wales over the past thirty years. This means that for the entirety of their lives, Welsh-language popular media has been associated with concepts of Welshness. The role of the media in the teens’ and others’ Welshness is discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER V: REINTERPRETATION OF CHORAL IDENTITY IN WALES

Changes in the Choral Institution

Welsh Choirs Today

This section highlights Welsh choral history throughout the twentieth century, with particular attention to how it is manifested today. The choral tradition has been rejuvenated in the Northwest by an abundance of new choirs forming over the past forty years, and popular media contributes to this ongoing process. As such, a second choral “Golden Age”\(^1\) may be in the making.

Many factors contributed to a slackening in community choral singing—or at least the end of its original Golden Age—in the early- to mid-twentieth century. Highly competitive but under-rehearsed choirs, who formed just for eisteddfodau without serving any other function, were accused of poor organization and poor singing. Others blamed untrained conductors for a general decline in Welsh choir quality. Specific criticisms were aimed at the tendency for choirs to choose volume gimmicks over a well-blended sound. These included loud, out-of-tune singing, but also strangely dramatic shifts in dynamics. More and more English choirs began winning eisteddfodau (Gareth Williams 1998: 144-149).

Sweeping social changes in early- to mid-twentieth century Wales further eroded the choral craze. First, there is evidence that the famous Welsh religious revival of 1904-1905 may have diminished interest in non-religious music activities, including choirs and

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\(^1\) This term is a reference to Gareth William’s assessment of the period from 1870 to WWI in Wales (1998: 144-5).
WWI was arguably the most drastic event to curtail social activities, which included choral singing. Moreover, changing interests and new activities caused community choral singing to wane. “Church meetings, the eisteddfod and the concert fight for their existence against the playhouse, horse-races and the cinema,” wrote a columnist in 1916, expressing the difficulty of maintaining Welshness in the Rhondda Valley in South Wales, which had become home to people from “every part of the world” (quotations translated from Welsh by Mari A. Williams 2000: 141). So at least as early as 1916, one could say that choral singing was seen as a sign of Welshness: choral hymn singing, competition, and performances were central to the church meetings, eisteddfodau, and concerts mentioned above. These were something to be protected and sustained amidst a sea of immigrants and changing lifestyles. Not surprisingly, community choral singing diminished as it competed with other social activities.

However, in the past forty years, several new choirs have been established in the Northwest. Many see them as “carrying on” the nineteenth-century phenomenon, which of course can more accurately be described as reinterpretation. The figure below shows MVCs from this region who performed in St. John’s Church’s summer concert series in Llandudno during 2008 and 2009.²


³ Information about these choirs was extracted from St. John’s unpublished concert programs from these two years. The choirs’ websites and my own interviews/conversations were also consulted, and data were confirmed by Owen 2009. MVC websites include: http://www.cormeibioncolwyn.com, http://www.freewebs.com/corllanrwst, http://www.denbigh-choiro.co.uk, http://www.maelgwn.co.uk, http://www.trelawnydmalevoicechoir.com, http://corypenrhyn.org/home.htm.
Eight of the twelve choirs listed above (67%) were founded in 1970 or later. Of the remaining four, two were formed in the 1950s and 1960s, and two in the 1930s. Only one choir (Côr Meibion y Penrhyn) has a continuous tradition that pre-dates the twentieth century. However, the Penrhyn Slate Quarry had multiple choirs until the 1930s when

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MVC</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year Established</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Côr Meibion Trelawnyd</td>
<td>near Prestatyn</td>
<td>1933 (dormant during WWII but otherwise continuous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côr Meibion y Penrhyn</td>
<td>Bethesda</td>
<td>1935 (from a continuous tradition predating 1900)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côr Meibion Llanddulas</td>
<td>near Abergele</td>
<td>1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côr Meibion Traeth</td>
<td>near Moelfre, Anglesey</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côr Meibion Maelgwn</td>
<td>Deganwy/Llandudno Junction</td>
<td>1970 (grew out of a cerdd dant group established in 1963)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côr Meibion Colwyn</td>
<td>Colwyn Bay</td>
<td>1972 (earlier choirs in the area predating 1900, and in the early 20th c.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côr Meibion Betws yn Rhos</td>
<td>near Abergele and Colwyn Bay</td>
<td>1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côr Meibion Bro Aled</td>
<td>Llansannan</td>
<td>1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côr Meibion Llanrwst Ar Cylch</td>
<td>Llanrwst</td>
<td>1986 (earlier choir—date unknown—here until the 1960s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côr Meibion Dyffryn Peris</td>
<td>Llanberis</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côr Meibion Dinbych A’r Cylch</td>
<td>Denbigh</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côr Meibion y Foel</td>
<td>Llanerchymedd, Anglesey</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
one large group was formed, and it is the choir formed in 1935 that is the origin of the current group (Owen 2009: 181).  

Despite earlier, former choirs in some of these areas, the specific choirs who participated in the previous chapter’s surveys were established in 1935, 1970, 1986, 1988, and 2000. Since records of choirs in North Wales are sparse (cf. Owen 2009), this chapter cannot include an accurate assessment of whether or not choirs are less abundant now than at any specific time in the past. However, the abundance of new choirs forming over the past forty to forty-five years might demonstrate a recent positive—rather than negative—change, signaling an expanding—rather than shrinking—MVC tradition in the Northwest. Thus, while many participants describe these groups as struggling to “maintain” an ancient tradition, it is more accurate to suggest that the Northwest MVC singers featured in this dissertation are reinterpreting choral singing as an important sign of their present-day Welshness.

Beyond the Northwest groups listed above, Meurig Owen’s history of MVCs throughout North Wales (2009) is useful in determining if this phenomenon goes beyond the small number of groups participating in this research. Owen’s research shows that many areas had choirs that disbanded, and some reformed several times before the latest version was established. For example, Côr Meibion y Rhos⁵ was founded in 1892, but

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⁴ Several of these other communities also had earlier choirs that previously disbanded, while Penrhyn’s tradition appears to be continuous. Examples include Llanrwst, who had a choir (founding date unknown) until the 1960s, and Colwyn Bay, whose first choir was founded in the 1890s, with subsequent choirs meeting on and off from the 1920s to the 1950s.

⁵ Rhosllanerchrugog (the home of Côr Meibion y Rhos) is known as the “largest village in Wales” (The BBC lists Rhosllanerchrugog’s population at approximately 10,000; Owen lists it as 9,000). This village is well known in Wales for its community choral activities. Owen 2009: 194-198 and BBC, “Northeast Wales: Rhos,” http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/northeast/sites/wrexham/pages/rhos.shtml (accessed 29 June 2011).
Owen discusses multiple disbandings and reformings—they disbanded 1905-1908, then again 1911-1913. For this choir, he is not clear about a date from whence the group has remained continuous. However, it appears that like Penrhyn, Côr Meibion y Rhos is one of the oldest choirs in North Wales still in existence; however, even they have not been entirely continuous.

Aside from these two anomalies, most choirs in North Wales are surprisingly new. Although this dissertation is focused on the Northwest region of Wales in particular, Meurig Owen’s history of all MVCs in North Wales shows a similar pattern to that related above. Figure 24 shows the founding dates for all MVCs featured in Owen’s book. All choirs here are MVCs; however, I have eliminated the phrase Côr Meibion for ease and clarity.

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6 By his narrative, it appears that the group did not disband again after 1913, but this is not explicitly stated. Owen 2009: 194-199.
Figure 24. MVCs in North Wales, extracted from Owen 2009.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choir Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>y Rhos</td>
<td>1913 (1892)†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangwm</td>
<td>1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyffryn Nantlle</td>
<td>1932*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trelawnyd</td>
<td>1933*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y Penrhyn</td>
<td>1935 (1890s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y Fron</td>
<td>1948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godre’r Aran</td>
<td>c. 1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penybontfawr</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newtown and District</td>
<td>1951†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arddudwy</td>
<td>1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanddulas</td>
<td>1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caergybi</td>
<td>1955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanfair Caereinion</td>
<td>1956††</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhos Orpheus</td>
<td>1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brymbo</td>
<td>1959†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moelwyn</td>
<td>1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberystwyth</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y Brythoniaid</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caernarfon</td>
<td>1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prycor</td>
<td>1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gobowen Orthopaedic Hospital</td>
<td>1968†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y Traeth</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maelgwn</td>
<td>1970**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colwyn</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cymau</td>
<td>1972†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bro Glyndwr</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyffryn Ceiriog</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hogia’r Ddwylan</td>
<td>1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betws-yn-Rhos</td>
<td>1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y Fflint</td>
<td>1975†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwyfor</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llansannan/Bro Aled</td>
<td>1976**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyfi</td>
<td>1980**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangollen</td>
<td>1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanrwst</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llywarch</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bro Dysynni</td>
<td>1980s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denbigh</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyffryn Peris</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantorion Colin Jones</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hogia Bodwrog</td>
<td>1999†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caerwys</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y Foel</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* was an earlier group that disbanded and reformed
†† formed for cerdd dant, then became a Male Voice Choir
 † originally formed as a Mixed choir, then became a Male Voice Choir
 †† originally formed as an octet, then became a Male Voice Choir
What Owen’s data show is that since 1970, twenty-two choirs have formed in North Wales, with eight others having formed in the 1960s, and nine in the 1950s. Only five choirs date from the 1930s and 1940s. One, *y Rhos*, predates the twentieth century, but it may have a later date of continuous existence, much like *Côr Meibion y Penrhyne*. Thus, of all the North Wales MVCs in existence today (45 total choirs), nearly half have only been around since the 1970s or later, with another 38% existing since the 1950s and/or 1960s; a mere 13% existed before 1950.

It appears then that despite the interviewees’ concerns, MVCs in Northwest Wales are not fading away. Rather than continuously diminishing since the end of the Golden Age, there seems to have been enough interest and effort to form many new Male Voice Choirs over the past few decades. Thus, despite there being insufficient data to show if the current numbers are an increase over, say, the number of choirs at turn of the last century, the data do show an increasing number of choirs being established *throughout* the twentieth century. This is especially true since the 1930s, with a boom in the past forty to forty-five years. And the data for Northwest choirs—though more limited—show even more robust support for this argument: 67% of the Northwest MVCs have been created since 1970.

In addition to this growth, there are notable consistencies among MVCs from the Golden Age to the present: choirs entertain and some also compete, and choirs typically represent a particular geographic location. However, ages and occupations are two elements that have changed drastically. This is in line with changes noted by Gareth Williams, who has researched *Côr Meibion Treorci* and other choirs in South Wales.  

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7 Williams has written a history of *Treorchi MVC* from its beginnings in 1883 to 2001 (Gareth Williams 2001). The choir also has a website: http://www.treorchymalechoir.com. Like many groups, they
Specifically, MVCs still often represent a particular community, but they no longer represent one particular workplace exclusively. For example, it has been noted that Côr Meibion y Penrhyn was named for the Penrhyn Slate Quarry, at which all of its original members worked. In addition to quarry workers—which now make up the minority of its members—Penrhyn’s website lists the following occupations found among its membership: teachers, professors, plumbers, accountants, ambulancemen, carpenters, computer consultants, television producers, barmen, firemen, farmers, bankers and businessmen.⁸

Inquiries about interviewees’ occupations were not part of the data collected for this dissertation. However, among the interviewees were a former police chief and a former fire chief, and most others were retirees who had never worked together, but instead joined their choir because it was the local choir. This pattern is consistent with data from South Wales: as late as 1947, 90% of singers in Côr Meibion Treorci were still employed in the coal industry, but as of 2001, none of these men were miners (Gareth Williams 2001: 157, 164-5).

Welsh MVCs are also getting older, which concerns many singers. The average age of the five MVCs featured in the previous chapter is 62.3 years old.⁹ More specifically, there were 19 participants ages 70-90, 15 in their 60s, 19 in their 40s and

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⁹ Many expressed their concerns to me, and the phenomenon of aging MVCs is featured in recent newspaper articles. See Ian Herbert, “Welsh Male Voice Choirs are Singing the Blues,” The Independent, 8 July 2000, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/welsh-male-voice-choirs-are-singing-the-blues-710189.html (accessed 2 November 2008). The ages are based on survey participants; fifty-seven of sixty participating MVC singers noted their age; three men left this blank.
50s, and just 4 in their 20s and 30s. Therefore, sixty percent of MVC singers in this research are over age 60. This trend is apparently also happening in South Wales as well: in 1947, the average age of Treorci’s choir members was between 20 and 30 years old; in 2001, it was 58 (Gareth Williams 2001: 157, 164-5).^{10}

In sum, these changes in Welsh MVCs, including older members and membership that is unrelated to employment, are accompanied by changes in repertoire—specifically, the addition of popular and music theater selections. In spite of concerns over its demise, the Welsh MVC, a product of the nineteenth century—albeit with slight changes in form—is actually abundant today in Northwest Wales.

In the following section, interviewees’ opinions about MVCs today are revealed, and the issue of whether or not there is a distinction between a “professional” and an “amateur” choral institution in Wales is examined. The role of media in these perceptions is also discussed, and the chapter closes with an exploration of how and why the changes introduced in this section represent reinterpretations of Welsh choral identity.

Are Welsh Choirs “Amateur” or “Professional”? 

In conducting research for this dissertation, it was impossible to fully distinguish between traditional, classical, and popular repertoire. For example, nineteenth-century

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^{10}MVC audiences’ ages parallel those of the choir members, too. This statement is based on my own observations and supported by interviewees, as well as Darren Devine, “It’s a Rivalry of Note for Choirs,” Wales Online, 15 October 2008, http://www.walesonline.co.uk/showbiz-and-lifestyle/news/2008/10/15/it-s-a-rivalry-of-note-for-choirs-91466-22039042/ (accessed 9 February 2009). I must reiterate that Llandudno is known for being a popular retirement community, and it attracts many elderly visitors. However, even the performances I saw outside of Llandudno were populated mostly by older audience members. In fact, even a young group like Only Men Aloud (whose audiences I observed at both their Llandudno and Liverpool concerts) sing to mostly elderly audiences, though perhaps with a few more middle-aged members than one would find at other MVC concerts. I saw only a few teens or twenty-somethings at OMA’s shows, all accompanying older people—presumably family members.
Welsh hymns—what one might instinctively call “traditional” music—are sometimes performed in elaborate arrangements, with singing technique taught by highly-trained classical singers/conductors. Similarly, groups sing songs by popular artists, but some of these songs appear in complex choral arrangements, and the singers employ classical singing techniques and training. All of the choirs observed perform a relatively eclectic mix of styles.  

In Chapter IV, distinctions were made between MVCs with “lighter” repertoire (e.g., less classical music) who focus on entertainment, and those with more classical repertoire and a more serious presentation. The former are also choirs who generally do not compete, and they add humor to their shows. The latter, on the other hand, compete as well as perform. Data are too limited to allow firm conclusions about how Welsh singers see these divisions, if they see them at all. In this section, interviewees’ comments shed light on how choir as an institution\(^\text{12}\) is perceived by choral singers today in Northwest Wales.

In the *Maelgwn* interviews, sixteen men discussed changes in the choral institution. Six of them mentioned an elevation of musical standards. Descriptions of “modern choirs”—the implication being newer groups, not their own—included words like “professional,” “contrived,” and “elite.” These responses seemed to imply that community groups such as theirs were somehow different from the types of groups forming today. However, their conductor is a professional, classically-trained musician,\(^\text{11}\) 

\(^{11}\) The exception is *Conwy Mixed*, since it is dedicated to singing oratorio. However, even this choir sang traditional Welsh hymns when the venue called for such repertoire.

\(^{12}\) It should be noted that a static entity is not being implied by the term “institution” (cf. Barth 1967: 661). Instead, it is more aptly described as an ongoing process of assigning meaning to choral singing.
and the high standards and discipline he introduced were described by these men as positive changes. Thus, it appears that these men make a distinction between “community” groups and “professional” groups, despite the former being high-quality musical entities. The distinction seems to lie in the members’ intent and motivation—I remind the reader that Maelgwn members’ reasons for being in the choir were related to socializing.

The modern choir that was mentioned most often was Only Men Aloud, undoubtedly since they had won a primetime televised choir competition less than two months before my fieldwork began. Discussions of Only Men Aloud fell into two evenly divided categories, each with four singers: one, OMA was described as a professional group, with the implication that they are not a typical MVC; and two, OMA was described as an inspiration to young male singers, implying not only that the group is part of the MVC tradition, but that it may be a positive force for the future of MVCs. Of the four singers in the former group, one described OMA’s formation as “professional soloists who came together,” adding: “…but they do have the MVC sound.” He seemed to suggest then that even though they sound like a Welsh MVC, they formed in a non-traditional way. According to Only Men Aloud’s director Tim Rhys-Evans, everyone in the group is there through audition or invitation; some were students of his, others he heard singing in other choirs. However, the fact that OMA members had to audition alone does not distinguish them from other MVCs; Maelgwn singers, for instance, also had to audition.

Another Maelgwn singer suggested that OMA’s singing style, specifically with microphones and amplification, was not classical, and therefore made them something
different from Maelgwn and other traditional MVCs. Conversely, one of the men who sees OMA as a positive force explained that many of them are Welsh speakers, and that they sing in Welsh. This implies that for this individual, using the Welsh language contributes to OMA’s qualifications as a Welsh MVC.

Only Men Aloud came up again while conversing with female singers in the Conwy Mixed Choir. The more positive attitude of the female singers concerning the future of Welsh choral singing has already been discussed in Chapter III. It is worth reiterating here that none of these singers referred to higher standards in Welsh choirs as elitist or otherwise outside of the traditional Welsh choral institution. One did suggest that Only Men Aloud was a different type of choir because of its repertoire, but even she was convinced that the choral institution and its standard of quality are growing.

Five other female singers specifically discussed the BBC choir competition Last Choir Standing,13 and/or its winning and second-place choirs (respectively), Only Men Aloud and Ysgol Glanaethwy. This they cited as evidence for the popularity of choral singing in modern Wales. Only one made a distinction between the two choirs, but she did so to demonstrate the variety among Welsh choirs in light of typically high standards.14 None of these women distinguished between these two groups and other choirs in Wales.15

13 This televised competition is discussed in detail in the following section.

14 She said that “Choirs have always been popular among the Welsh people and there is no sign of it fading—Last Choir Standing TV competition had two Welsh choirs in the final. The standard was very high and the choirs very different…” She also said that choirs are changing, but she described this process as “very exciting.” She called new, modern choirs “brilliant,” explaining that “young people are making their own choirs now, rather than joining the old ones.”

15 Interestingly, two of these women also mentioned that they probably would not have joined Conwy choir if there had been auditions, or if the choir competed. This suggests that its amateur status was
Therefore, although it was a small sample, the women I interviewed unanimously described choral singing as increasingly popular in Wales, and none of them suggested that an elitism existed, or that televised, “flashier” choirs were something different from traditional Welsh choirs. The exception is one singer, who—as noted above—feels that Only Men Aloud might be different because of its abundant popular repertoire. She was also notably older than all the other female respondents.

Like the adult female singers, the youth of Glanaethwy were also overwhelmingly positive about the future of the Welsh choral institution. However, their comments did not necessarily show whether or not they see distinctions between amateur and professional choirs. The teenagers’ reasons for being in Glanaethwy may indicate a shift towards professionalism, with so many respondents choosing musical-, performing-, and/or travel-opportunities as at least one aspect of their impetus for being in the choir. Then again, as with the adults, friendship overshadowed all other reasons, suggesting that even in a choir with other functions, the social element may still be most meaningful.\(^\text{16}\)

Although the interview data are limited in revealing how singing is viewed today with regards to amateurism versus professionalism, this has historically been an issue in Northwest Wales. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were concerns about complacency and technical deficiencies among Welsh choirs, who were accused of being loud while lacking quality intonation and phrasing. Blame for this was often placed on amateur conductors. For instance, Joseph Bennett, in a late nineteenth-

\[^{16}\text{Once again, } OMA \text{ parallels these other choirs because of their emphasis on their own camaraderie. While I did not conduct as thorough research among this choir as I did with the others, director Tim Rhys-Evans brought up this topic (fun/camaraderie/closeness) repeatedly in our interview.}\]
century edition of the *Daily Telegraph*, blamed a Dowlais choir’s loss on the choir’s conductor, whose business he condescendingly described as “something to do with pigs” (Gareth Williams 1998: 144-145).

The training of the singers was also called into question during this period. In 1881, a questionnaire by John Curwen at the National Eisteddfod showed that in one choir, only 80 of 250 members could read music, and these read almost exclusively solfa—rather than staff—notation. In another choir, these numbers were 68 out of 220; in yet another, just 6 out of 60 (Gareth Williams 1998: 154). Gareth Williams’ history of this period reveals many opinions suggesting that amateurism was eroding Welsh choral standards.

The lack of training among conductors and singers alike, coupled with the widespread popularity of singing in Wales, also produced a “nature versus nurture” debate: English victories over Welsh choirs in choral competitions were credited to better discipline and training, despite the English having less “naturally” good voices (Gareth Williams 1998: 149). Widespread recognition of choral singing as a sign of Welshness was clearly in place.

In addition to assumptions that they had superior in-born singing abilities, it was also asserted that the Welsh had a natural tendency for being overly emotional (Gareth Williams 1998: 145). This too was blamed for falling standards in Welsh singing: “The hurly burly of a battle with its moans and gasps of the wounded, the roaring of the lions—if not the wagging of their tails—earthquakes, hurricanes, catastrophes are the subject matter on which the Welsh chorister loves to vent his tense emotionalism and tear
his passions to shreds. It is often magnificent…but is it music?” (*The Musical Times*, 1903 in Gareth Williams 1998: 190).

Perhaps the most obvious references to the amateur quality of Welsh choirs were criticisms leveled at the popularity of community and/or religious singing. For example, composer/critic/professor David Jenkins felt that in 1899, congregational singing—though at the height of its popularity—had been declining in quality for twenty years, due to cymanffoedd canu being social occasions above all else. His criticisms were extended also to choral competitions, which like the hymn singing events were more popular than ever. Jenkins, like many others, felt that the quality of singing at these occasions was suffering from the singers’ lack of training. He criticized women in particular, and suggested that the religious revival of 1904-1905 was musically counter-productive, as it popularized “vulgar” tunes over challenging repertoire. He also specifically wanted training for working-class singers, which he recognized as the bulk of the Welsh choral institution (Gareth Williams 1998: 167-8).

Similarly, D. Emlyn Evans, another well-known composer/critic/adjudicator during the Golden Age of the Welsh choral institution, worked toward raising the standards of Welsh singing. Like Jenkins, Evans was interested in more challenging and varied repertoire for Welsh choirs. He too implied that community—and as such, untrained—singing was a hindrance to the institution. For example, he refused to fill time at eisteddfodau with community singing. He even walked out at a competition in

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17 It was already discussed in Chapter III that during this period, Welsh women were often blamed for the increasing decline of the language. Here, we find their lack of training, due in part to their active role in chapel meetings, being blamed for diminishing choral standards. Gareth Williams notes a “misogynistic element” in these discussions (1998: 167).
Llandudno in 1896, when a group of American Welsh wanted to sing a hymn en masse (Gareth Williams 1998: 160).

These debates are not unique to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When Cefin and Rhian Roberts founded Ysgol Glanaethwy just over twenty years ago, they were met with opposition from those who felt that the couple was undermining the amateur nature of Welsh choral singing. Specifically, many people felt that attending a school that charged tuition gave Glanaethwy singers an unfair advantage over other youth singers in Wales. Roberts explained common reactions he received: “we don’t need this professionalism in Wales—it’s always been an amateur thing, why should children pay to learn to sing and dance?” This was a major controversy when he and his co-founder and wife Rhian were trying to drum up interest to begin the school.

They encountered intense negativity from schools, communities, and choirs in their early years. Rather than a passing concern, it remains with them to the present: they note that in every interview they have ever done on the history of the school, this issue comes up. To the present day, Glanaethwy no longer competes in the Urdd (Youth) National Eisteddfod because of former negative attitudes toward its competing there. However, as Glanaethwy achieved success in competitions outside of Wales over time,

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18 Cefin and Rhian Roberts, interview by author, 21 June 2009, Debenhams Cafe, digital audio, Llandudno, Conwy, Wales. All information about Glanaethwy in this section is from our interview, unless otherwise indicated.

19 They attribute the enormity of the conflict at least in part to Wales being such a small country.

20 The Urdd Eisteddfod is a dedicated Welsh-language competition specifically for youth performers. In 2011, around 100,000 visitors were expected over the week, with around 15,000 people taking part in competitions. BBC News, “Swansea 2011: Urdd Eisteddfod Hosts First Full Day,” http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-west-wales-13594309 (accessed 7 July 2011). Roberts says negativity toward Glanaethwy at this competition has subsided somewhat: some have asked them to return, but they continue to decline the invitation.
many people changed their thinking and saw *Glanaethwy* as a positive representative for Wales, and a positive part of the choral institution.

What is clear from *Glanaethwy’s* story is that high standards, professionalism, and paid training have bred negative attitudes among some in Wales. In my own limited experience, I heard nothing but positive things about *Glanaethwy*; singers and non-singers alike were proud of the choir’s recent successes. Both *Glanaethwy* and *Only Men Aloud* were described to me with pride because they were Welsh choirs, competing and winning outside of Wales, earning victories over all the non-Welsh choirs on an extremely popular televised competition. Thus, even though some see them as new, modern, and/or different versions of the traditional Welsh choir, they are still praised for effectively representing Welsh singing prowess.

The histories of both the Golden Age choirs and *Ysgol Glanaethwy* show that the Welsh choral institution is not—or at least, has not always been—entirely free from an “amateur versus professional” distinction. In my admittedly limited fieldwork, it was mostly MVC singers who made this distinction. It appears to me that there is a recognized difference in Wales, but that the boundaries are blurry, and the two exist along a continuum rather than in opposition.\(^\text{21}\) As shown in the subsequent section, these labels are affected today by popular media.

\(^{21}\) It should be noted that some MVCs require auditions, while others do not. Thus, while a choir like *Maelgwn* is seen as a community group and a domain for socializing, it is limited to singers of a certain caliber. It has already been noted that *Conwy Mixed* does not require auditions, even though the group sings difficult classical repertoire, often accompanied by an orchestra. Therefore, *Conwy* may appear “professional” to observers, yet it is open to anyone in the community. Likewise, *Ysgol Glanaethwy*, with their more “modern” image (choreography, media appearances, etc.) does not require auditions. As such, it is interesting to note that the latter has been accused of undermining the amateur nature of youth choral singing in Wales. The students do pay tuition, but other choir members (e.g., those in *Conwy*) also pay a minimal weekly fee, which functions as dues for the choir to help with administrative costs.
Welsh Choirs in the Media

Television in Wales

Before discussing the presence of choral singing in the media, it is beneficial to present a brief history of television in Wales, which involves government funding and Welsh language activism. The history of Welsh-language and Welsh-interest broadcasting is part of the wider context of the language struggles of the twentieth century. These struggles were presented in detail in Chapter II, and this section continues that discussion. Moreover, a basic understanding of the Welsh television system is essential for comprehending the role television has played in language survival, as well as in the popularity of choral singing. The latter obviously has a direct impact on this dissertation, and at the end of this chapter, I argue that television remains pivotal in the reinterpretation of choral identity in Wales.

Occasional Welsh-language transmissions appeared in the 1950s, the first in 1953.\textsuperscript{22} However, locally-produced programming was scarce: in 1954, only 2 hours and 40 minutes of English-language and 1 hour and 25 minutes of Welsh-language programming were broadcast in Wales per week. BBC Wales began in 1964, so that Wales could opt out of the national British service for 8.9 hours every week, during which time locally-produced English- and Welsh-language programs could be broadcast.

By the end of the 1960s, members of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (the Welsh Language Society) began to fight for increased Welsh-language programming. They developed a campaign of civil disobedience that included interrupting a broadcast and a

session of parliament. They also blocked roads and damaged television equipment. Even more widespread was the refusal to pay the annual television license fee. They proposed a fourth channel for Wales to meet their needs.

As their campaign intensified, a government-sponsored report in 1975 recommended 25 hours a week of Welsh-language programs on a new fourth channel. Furthermore, it was recommended that the seven hours on BBC Wales that would then be open—after the Welsh-language programs were moved to the new channel—should be filled with English-language, Welsh-interest programs.

During the 1979 general election, both Labor and Conservative Parties claimed to support this proposal; however, once elected the latter renounced its promise. Continued protests and refusals to submit fees, enhanced by Welsh MP Gwynfor Evans’ plans for a hunger strike, finally achieved a fourth channel for Wales. Sianel Pedwar Cymru (abbreviated as “S4C,” which translates as “Channel Four Wales”) was born in 1982.

By the 1990s, S4C was transmitting 1,753 hours of Welsh-language and 5,041 hours of locally-produced English-language programming per year; this is roughly 30 hours per week in Welsh and 93 hours per week in English. The channel gave rise to Welsh production centers in Caernarfon in North Wales and Cardiff in South Wales. By the early 1990s, Cardiff had five animation centers with approximately 150 professional animators, and 45 independent production companies. Thus, S4C clearly created a need for Welsh-speaking professionals. A report by Cardiff University for S4C in 2010 showed that the channel contributed 90-million pounds to Wales’ economy that year, and was responsible for 2,100 jobs.²³

Aside from its economic impact, S4C’s contributions to Welsh language and culture have been scrutinized. As all television stations in the UK struggle to compete with increasing choices for viewers (e.g., satellite, internet), S4C’s impact is being debated. However, the BBC’s Management Review Report for 2010-2011 shows increases in the number of weekly viewers for both BBC Wales’ English-language programs and for S4C as a whole from 2008 through 2011. When Welsh transmitters were switched from analog to digital in March 2010, S4C became an all-Welsh language channel, and as such it no longer carries several of its former programs. It remains to be seen how this will affect its future ratings and influence. Several reports show that Welsh speakers in Wales think the channel is important to their language’s survival, and others show an increase in the number of viewers across the UK who watched S4C’s broadcasts of summer events in Wales, including eisteddfodau.

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24 Even Britain’s most popular channel, BBC1, had a 39% share of television viewers in 1981, but in 2009, it was only 21%. Broadcasters’ Audience Research Board, “Annual Percent Shares of Viewing (Individuals) 1981-2010,” http://www.barb.co.uk/facts/annualShareOfViewing_s=s4 (accessed 21 August 2011).

25 BBC Cymru/Wales English-language figures are as follows: 2008-2009 = 856,000; 2009-2010 = 947,000; 2010-2011 = 1,000,000. BBC Cymru/Wales S4C are: 2008-2009 = 166,000; 2009-2010 = 167,000; 2010-2011 = 190,000. BBC, “About BBC Cymru Wales,” http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/info/sites/management/facts.shtml (accessed 8 August 2011).


27 A government review from November 2010 suggested that S4C was running inefficiently, being out-of-touch with viewers’ tastes. It also questioned whether or not the station was using more funding than was justified by the benefits it offers to Welsh language and culture. In the end, the report concluded that there was not enough evidence to confirm or refute these arguments. The report showed some other notable figures. First, it stated that 155,000 Welsh speakers consistently watch S4C weekly (about a quarter of the Welsh-speaking population). It also showed that Welsh-language programs on S4C scored higher than other channels, including BBC1, BBC2 and ITV1, using a measure called Audience Appreciation (AI). Another poll (this one by YouGov) showed that 79% of Welsh speakers and 55% of the total Welsh and non-Welsh speakers alike agreed that “S4C is important in safeguarding the future of the Welsh language.” The Head of Research at S4C, Carys Evans, notes other impressive numbers: 1.4 million people across the UK tuned in to Wales’ 2010 televised summer events (400,000 more than the previous year), and there were over a million sessions of people watching S4C’s programs online through the channel’s “Clic” service in the first nine months of 2010, a 52% increase over 2009. Evans does not
In October 2010, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) announced that funding for the channel would pass from their department to the BBC. As part of the plan, the BBC will take over part of the funding of S4C from 2013, with DCMS reducing its grant by 94% over the next five years. This prompted an immediate response among Welsh-language activists, including The Welsh Language Society, who called on Welsh people to boycott paying their television license fees unless the BBC could guarantee the future independence of S4C.

This activism carried on into 2011. In January, it was reported that over one hundred people had joined in the license boycott, including some high-profile politicians and artists. In March, two activists, ages 21 and 35, were arrested after breaking into and vandalizing Conservative party offices in Cardiff (one of the activists called the police to the scene himself). More arrests were made when protesters spray-painted “ACHUB S4C” (SAVE S4C) on BBC buildings in London.

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It remains difficult to predict any long-term effects of these changes to S4C, and how effective the protests will be in changing the channel’s fate. Now that the channel shows exclusively Welsh-language programs, it may have overall fewer viewers: Welsh is, after all, a minority language; however, English subtitles are available for most of S4C’s shows. On the other hand, this change may also make it even more potent as a symbol of Welsh-language activism in Wales. One must also take into account that there are increasing numbers of Welsh speakers in Wales, and S4C’s reported viewing figures over the past few years suggest that the channel is still doing well, despite the increasing availability of other entertainment media.

*Televised Choral Singing in Wales*

Clearly, Welsh-language media are integral to the struggle to save the Welsh language in Wales. What is important to this chapter is that among the examples of televised Welsh-language entertainment programs, there are several Welsh-language *choral* programs. For example, *Dechrau Canu, Dechrau Cannol* is a hymn-singing program—essentially a televised gymanfa ganu—that has been on-air since 1961. It

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33 For instance, in 2010 the highest viewed episode of the popular Welsh soap opera *Pobol y Cwm* had comparable viewing figures to BBC1’s *East Enders*; each was watched by about one in six viewers in their respective audiences—17% of Welsh speakers watched the former, versus 15.5% across the UK watching the latter. *UK Parliament,* “S4C—Welsh Affairs Committee,” http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmwelaf/614/61405.htm (accessed 8 July 2011).
inspired an English-language version called *Songs of Praise*, and both remain popular today.\(^{34}\)

In addition to this program, televised choral competitions are also popular in Wales today. Tim Rhys-Evans of *Only Men Aloud* describes their popularity: “…one of the ways I think the confidence in our culture is shown is how these competitions like the Eisteddfod, *Côr Cymru*…they fill up TV schedules. When they’re on, people will stay in to watch the Eisteddfod…you know, ‘who’s won the National this year in the big piece?’ So that’s been televised for decades and decades and decades now…”\(^{35}\)

Coverage of the National Eisteddfod is consistently one of the most-watched shows on S4C for the week in which it is on, and even one of the most-watched S4C broadcasts for the year. BBC Cymru/Wales’ annual reports on S4C from 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 show the National Eisteddfod among the Top 10 Programs for the year in both years (reflecting the 2008 and 2009 festivals).\(^{36}\) According to their 2010-2011 report, not only was the National (2010) once again in the Top 10 most-watched S4C programs for the year, but *Only Men Aloud*’s performance at the opening concert was the single most-
watched program for S4C that year.\textsuperscript{37} Two other National Eisteddfod events, the closing concert and gymanfa ganu, also appeared in the year’s list of Top 5 Programs. Over 100 hours of the 2010 festival were broadcast in all.\textsuperscript{38}

The International Eisteddfod (or Llangollen\textsuperscript{39} Eisteddfod of Music and Dance) is also broadcast on television. Coverage now includes the festival’s “Choir of the World Competition,” an event founded in 1987 to determine the top choir out of four categories: Mixed, Female, Male, and Chamber.\textsuperscript{40} This competition remains the finale of the week-long festival, but it has been extended to include five choir types—a “Barbershop/Close Harmony” category has been added. The winning choir from each category competes for the Pavarotti Trophy and being crowned “Choir of the World.”\textsuperscript{41} Like the National, the

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid. Viewing figures from S4C show the concert as the number-one show for the week it was broadcast, S4C, http://www.s4c.co.uk/abouts4c/viewing/e_archive.shtml (accessed 13 July and 27 July 2011).


\textsuperscript{39} This town is the location of the annual event. I remind the reader that this eisteddfod is open to musicians and dancers from around the world; it is not an exclusively Welsh-language competition like the National.


\textsuperscript{41} BBC Wales-Music, “Llangollen Eisteddfod,” http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/music/sites/llangollen-eisteddfod/ (accessed 13 July 2011). The Llangollen Eisteddfod actually includes eight categories: the five listed above (including the newer Barbershop/Close Harmony category, which I was told was added just a few years ago) and three Youth categories (“Youth,” “Senior Children’s,” and “Junior Children’s”); only the adult choirs compete in “Choir of the World.”

Pavarotti lent his name to this prestigious award fifty years after his choir won a Male Choir prize at the competition. Llangollen Eisteddfod of Music and Dance, “2011 Results,” http://www.international-eisteddfod.co.uk/en/competitors/2011-results (accessed 13 July 2011) and Brian and Sue Evans, Office Administrators, International Eisteddfod (personal communication).
International Eisteddfod has been on its week’s Top 10 Program Lists for S4C since at least 2008.\footnote{Broadcaster’s Audience Research Board, http://www.barb.co.uk/report/weeklyTopProgrammes? (accessed 27 July 2011).}

What is important here is that these choir competitions are among the most popular broadcasts on S4C. Even more notable for this dissertation is the fact that new choral programs continue to be added to Wales’ television line up. For instance, Côr Cymru is a televised choral competition that began in 2003; it is held every two years. According to S4C’s website, the competition is open to “choirs from Wales or those further afield with a close connection to Wales, or choirs which perform regularly in the Welsh language.”

There are five choir type categories in Côr Cymru: Youth (under age 25), Children’s (age 16 and under), Mixed, Female and Male Voice Choirs.\footnote{There is also a prize for the competition’s best conductor (at least since 2007). Unlike the participants of this dissertation, S4C uses the term “Female Voice Choir,” rather than “Ladies Choir,” as the English translation for “Côr Merched.” All information on this competition comes from S4C’s website: S4C, “Côr Cymru,” http://www.s4c.co.uk/e_press_level2.shtml?id=240 and http://www.s4c.co.uk/e_press_level2.shtml?id=180 (accessed 8 July 2011).} Even though there are winners in each category, only one choir is crowned the champion over all in the final round.\footnote{Preliminary rounds occur the prior year, with semi-final and final rounds broadcast on S4C in the spring.} The panel consists of international judges, and the top prize for the winning choir is £7,000.

Robert Nicholls of S4C says of this competition: “Wales boasts a long tradition of fine choral singing and S4C aims to raise the standard even further…S4C is passionate about the arts and the Côr Cymru initiative shows our commitment to bringing the best in live choral music to our viewers in their own homes.” In our interview, Tim Rhys-Evans...
called the competition “impartial.” He explains: “In the first round, an audio recording is sent off to three judges. Your choir is given a code number, so nobody knows: they don’t know who you are and they don’t announce who the judges are until the first live round. And it’s just really shown, I think, the strength of choirs that we have here.”

*Côr Cymru* gained viewers consistently from 2005 to 2009. In 2011, it was reported that as many as 60,000 viewers watched *Côr Cymru* 2011 on S4C, while S4C’s website shows just 46,000. Either number is down from the 2009 figures reported by S4C (67,000). I am not an expert in television ratings, nor do I have enough data to speculate as to why there was a decline in the number of viewers for the 2011 competition. However, as noted previously, all television programs now compete with an ever-increasing number of options for viewers, and S4C has an added challenge in that some of its shows—including *Côr Cymru*—are broadcast in Welsh.

While the aforementioned shows were broadcast on S4C, 2008’s *Last Choir Standing* was a choir competition broadcast primetime across the entire UK on BBC1, in English. According to a press release from 2007, the show was originally called “Choir Wars,” and it was described as the “biggest singing talent show, with the greatest number of contestants, ever mounted on television.”

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45 Figures for 2003—the first year of the competition—are not listed. There were 48,000 viewers in 2005, 57,000 in 2007, and 67,000 in 2009.


47 It was discussed earlier that since March 2010, S4C switched to all-Welsh language programming. However, even before then, many shows—including the choral shows discussed here—were broadcast in Welsh.

The criteria for choirs entering the show included membership of ten to fifty people, all over the age of 13. Sixty choirs were chosen to audition in London after having sent in an example of their performance abilities. Twenty-seven choirs moved on to the next round, then just fifteen were chosen to compete in three “heats.” Each heat was a competition amongst five of the choirs, who performed first together to open the show, and then competed with two songs each. One winning and one losing choir was chosen by the panel of judges, with the other three competing for second place and a chance to move on with the winning choir. Near the end, the six remaining choirs were the ones judged by public vote, and eventually there were just three choirs, and finally two, remaining in the competition.49

Televised choral competitions were nothing new in Wales. Furthermore, this program followed several other programs about choral singing in Britain, including BBC Radio 3’s Choir of the Year, BBC 1’s Songs of Praise (the English version of Dechrau Canu, Dechrau Cannol) and BBC 2’s The Choir.50 Still, Last Choir Standing was an enormous undertaking. First, choirs were required to record a “safety track.” This was a studio recording of their performance pieces that was mixed in with their live singing during the televised performances. As the competition neared its end, it was viewers’ votes that determined winning choirs. Most notably, Last Choir Standing included extensive choreography, taught by a BBC-provided choreographer.


The two choirs who battled for the number-one slot were both Welsh, a point expressed to me many times during my year in Wales. *Ysgol Glanaethwy* and *Only Men Aloud* devoted much of the summer of 2008 to grueling travel, rehearsals, and performances for the various stages of the competition. Both groups had to tailor their repertoire for this event: the show had a definite pop-song bent (pieces had to be crowd-pleasers), and the audience was primarily non-Welsh speaking. In the end, the viewers chose OMA over Glanaethwy as the winners.\(^{51}\)

*Last Choir Standing* ran for 16 episodes, on Saturday nights between 5 July and 30 August 2008. The final show—*Only Men Aloud* versus *Glanaethwy*—had 5.56 million viewers.\(^{52}\) In the following section, the role of such television programs, as well as other media, in the Welsh choral institution is discussed. How *Last Choir Standing*’s widespread popularity affected the two Welsh choirs who competed for the top prize is discussed, as is the media’s role in the broader context of choral identity in Wales.

**Reinterpretation of Welsh Choral Identity**

*Welshness in the Media*

All of the most salient signs of Welshness discussed in this dissertation—language, geography, and choral singing—have been represented as such in Welsh media. I have already discussed the relationship between Welsh language and television


\(^{52}\)One source suggests that this was a quarter of all British viewers for its time slot (25% share between 8:50 and 9:20pm). Leigh Holmwood, “TV ratings: X Factor Outperforms Final of Last Choir Standing,” 1 September 2008, http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/sep/01/tvratings.television1 (accessed 12 Feb 2009).
(above), and language, geography, and identity in the BBC series *Gavin and Stacey* (2007-2010, see Chapter II). Geography and Welshness are also featured specifically in the 1995 film *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill but Came Down a Mountain*. The story revolves around a South Wales community at risk of losing the label “mountain” for their village’s most prominent topographic feature, when English surveyors come to measure it and rename it a “hill” instead. At one point, the narrator—a Welsh villager—describes how the land is essential to their identity, and he actually says that the English are “taking away our Welshness” by changing the name and status of their terrain.

In addition to language and geography, there are also examples of Welshness-as-choral singing in Welsh films. The following example demonstrates not only this Welshness and choral singing connection, but also some of the gender issues discussed in Chapter III. Rachel Thomas says in the film *Valley of Song* (1953): “None of you could ever know what it means to me to sing that part. All the year it’s cooking and washing and mending I am. But when “Messiah” came around I stopped being Mrs. Lloyd undertaker.” I was Mair Lloyd—contralto” (David Berry 1994: 234-5). David Berry suggests that “there was hardly a mining picture in the forties and fifties without a choir scene or a moment when colliers expressed their camaraderie in song” (1994: 11). He refers to this sign being featured specifically in *Proud Valley* (1940), *The Heritage* 

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53 Several sources indicate that Welsh villagers use(d) nicknames for people based on their occupations, in order to distinguish between people who share common names. So “Mrs. Lloyd undertaker” refers to the fact that her husband is Mr. Lloyd, but specifically the Mr. Lloyd who is the undertaker. This was emphasized also in the film *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill but Came Down a Mountain*, and to me during my fieldwork as well. The latter included an explanation by one of my participants, who is known as “Huwân” in his hometown: Huw or Hugh is his name, tân is Welsh for “fire”—he formerly worked as a fire chief.
Berry calls eisteddfodau and choirs “familiar icons of Welsh film.”

Choir singing as a sign of Welshness has also appeared often in online newspaper articles, including in 2000, 2008, and 2011. Specifically, these examples focus on the “fading” of the MVC tradition, with an emphasis on the increasing ages of choir members. Reading about an uncertain future for MVCs and seeing an abundance of Mixed groups on television probably fuels MVC singers’ fears about the changing form of their choir type.

In sum, language, geography, and choral singing all appear as Welsh signs in popular media in Wales, and they have for much of the last century. This exposure strengthens the cognitive connections made between Welshness and these signs. Portrayals of language, geography, and choral singing as signs of Welshness abound in Welsh media to the present day. Those broadcast on S4C may reach a more limited audience since they are broadcast in Welsh. It also remains to be seen how the switch to all-Welsh broadcasting will affect the number of viewers tuning in to the station overall, but what may result is a strengthening of the connection between the Welsh language and choral singing in the minds of those both inside and outside the group.

54See Berry 1994: 5, 11, 217, 244-5, 247.


56It is unclear if English subtitles are available for the choir shows. I was not aware of this service when I was in Wales; I watched the channel often but without the aid of any translation.
Shows broadcast outside of S4C (such as *Last Choir Standing*) obviously reach a wider audience, and the fact that two Welsh choirs were battling for the top prize may have strengthened the connection between Welshness and singing, particularly for those outside of Wales. But these associations outside of the Welsh-speaking community and outside of Wales are nothing new. Consider the following dialogue from the popular BBC sitcom *Blackadder* (third series, episode 5, 1987):

Blackadder: Have you ever been to Wales, Baldrick?
Baldrick: No, but I've often thought I'd like to.
Blackadder: Well don't. It's a ghastly place. Huge gangs of tough, sinewy men roam the Valleys, terrorizing people with their close-harmony singing.

On the other hand, shows about singing are popular throughout Britain and are not limited to Welsh choirs (see ITV’s *Britain’s Got Talent* or BBC’s *The Choir*). Moreover, it seems that a “singing craze” has also hit the American media—e.g., NBC’s *America’s Got Talent*, *The Voice*, *The Sing-Off*, and Fox’s *American Idol* and the sitcom *Glee*.

Nevertheless, there is a historical precedent for Welsh people being portrayed as choral singers in popular media. Thus, by representing Wales and Welsh singing prowess in such a high-stakes, salient, Britain-wide competition, *OMA* and *Glanaethwy* enhanced these connections between Welshness and choral singing in the UK. The show also had an enormous impact on the two Welsh finalist choirs: this included Britain-wide (and beyond) recognition for *Ysgol Glanaethwy*, and a multi-million pound, five-record contract for winners *Only Men Aloud*. 
Evidence of Reinterpretation

There are several aspects of the choral institution in Wales that have remained unchanged from the original Golden Age period through today. First, both competition—particularly in eisteddfodau—and performance are part of many choirs’ schedules. Second, singers learn either by ear, using sol-fa or staff notation, or by some combination of these methods. Finally, many of the same debates of the old days continue to the present. For example, issues still being discussed today include the importance of choral membership that develops and displays musical prowess versus membership primarily for socializing, and singers and directors who are classically trained versus those who are not—the “amateur versus professional” distinction.

One of the most notable changes in the institution is the addition of choreography, and this change has been directly influenced by popular media. Director Tim Rhys-Evans says\(^{57}\) that Only Men Aloud often added a little choreography to the end of a show, just for amusement. However, ever since Last Choir Standing, when the BBC provided a choreographer and choreography for each choir, Only Men Aloud now performs extensive choreography in all of its shows. I observed some choreography—even among the older choirs—at the St. John’s Concert Series in Llandudno (Denbigh MVC, October 2008) the North Wales Choral Festival (November 2008), and on 2009’s Côr Cymru.\(^{58}\)

When I mentioned the dancing I saw on Côr Cymru, Rhys-Evans suggested that movement is being added more and more to Welsh choir performances, in an effort to

\(^{57}\) Information from Tim Rhys-Evans comes from our interview unless otherwise indicated.

\(^{58}\) Meurig Owen writes about Côr Meibion Dwyfor trying to incorporate some choreography. The choir’s director, Buddug Roberts, says: “We’re a fair way behind Only Men Aloud…They dance with sticks, move about, wear fancy waistcoats and sing with a big band…I don’t think we’re ready for that!” He also adds: “it can be a bit of a disaster, with some members going one way, some the other and bumping into each other!” Buddug Roberts in Owen 2009: 94.
make performances more entertaining to both the audience and prospective choristers of the future. Like other conductors I spoke with, he emphasizes the quality of the singing above all else, but sees choreography increasingly becoming part of Welsh choral singing. Making sure they have a high-quality arrangement, that they start with the text and get a wide range of colors—these are the things Only Men Aloud values over physical movements. Yet as an entertainer, Rhys-Evans also knows the audience plays a part in choices about both repertoire and choreography. After talking about all the aspects of choral singing that he is passionate about—the text, the arrangements, color, the voices—he adds: “…but having said that, I know we could sing the most wonderful Mendelssohn motet, with stunning variety of color and attention to German and we’ll get polite applause from an audience, but we kick our legs and they go crazy!”

Côr Glanaethwy’s history of using choreography is slightly different, due to its director’s background in theater. Cefin Roberts was an actor and studied dance before founding Ysgol Glanaethwy, and he has received numerous prestigious awards for his work in music and theater; he was the first Artistic Director of Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru—the Welsh-Language National Theater—a post he held from 2003 to 2010.59

Roberts describes his work at the start of the Welsh-language channel S4C (1982) as not being limited to typical Welsh choir performance, in which choirs just stood in rows and sang. As a dancer, actor, and fan of close-harmony groups and music


60 Information about Cefin Roberts and Ysgol Glanaethwy is from our interview unless otherwise noted.
theater, it is not surprising that Roberts would include choreography in his choirs’ performances. He called this “entertainment through the medium of music” for S4C, noting that it “was probably at the time quite new in Wales,” compared to the older, more traditional forms of choral singing. He described using movement in choral singing throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the latter with Glanaethwy. And although they had to use the BBC’s choreographer on Last Choir Standing, Roberts usually designs his own choreography.

One could argue that as more and more choirs adopt the use of choreography, the Welsh choir institution is being reinterpreted by musicians who incorporate a “show choir” image. Undoubtedly, this process is fueled by the need for entertainers in the relatively new Welsh-language industry, created and sustained in part by S4C. This glamorization creates a relatively new form for Welsh choirs—a form only present in the past thirty years, and it coincides with the development of Welsh-language media in Wales.

However, it is still a part of a continuum that began with the choral institution that developed in the nineteenth century; it is seen as such in Wales, and new forms of choir clearly do not replace older, more traditional forms of choral singing. For instance, training with Cefin and Rhian Roberts has allowed many Glanaethwy alumni to succeed in entertainment careers—performing and presenting on S4C, or working in the West End in London. But these Glanaethwy-trained singers also perform outside of theatrical choral singing: I met a Glanaethwy alumnus in the Conwy Mixed Choir, who joined for the challenge of singing oratorio. I also spoke with two current male members of Côr Glanaethwy, both aged 16: one is already in his local MVC, and the other plans to join
when he graduates. The Welsh Cerdd Dant Society’s website lists a Glanaethwy-trained performer, Einion Dafydd, as an innovator in this traditional Welsh genre. Thus, despite some choirs reinterpreting their image, traditional choir types—similar to those described in the Golden Age—still abound in Wales.

In addition to choreography, changes in repertoire represent some of the clearest elements of reinterpretation by present-day Welsh choirs. As one would expect, choir directors must choose pieces for their current audiences’ tastes and/or adjudicators’ requirements. Thus, the venue directly influences—if not determines—the repertoire. However, overall there has been an increase in adding popular pieces to choral repertoire in Wales.61

This phenomenon further blurs the distinctions between amateur (community or traditional) choirs and professional (or modern) choirs. One notable fact about the choirs is that despite concerns over professional choirs being something separate from amateur choirs, their repertoire is not that different. For example, Only Men Aloud has been criticized for performing “too much” popular music.62 As noted earlier, several singers also mentioned called OMA a professional choir as opposed to a community or amateur

61 Gareth Williams notes some negativity toward this new repertoire, as “an indiscriminate mélange of arrangements, spirituals, medleys, hymn-tunes and operatic choruses wrenched from context.” However, he adds: “Yet in Wales it draws upon the accumulated capital of an industrially based process of cultural production that contributed to the shaping of the social order between 1880 and 1914. The Welsh male choir survives as a social and musical phenomenon and a remarkable institution of popular culture” (1998: 192).

62 All quotes from Tim Rhys-Evans come from my interview with him, unless otherwise noted (Tim Rhys-Evans, interview by author, 6 May 2009, digital audio, Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool, England).
group. However, *Only Men Aloud*’s set list for the show in Liverpool, 6 May 2009, included many traditional Welsh songs, such as “Gwahoddiad” and “Cwm Rhondda.”

*OMA* sang in Welsh as well as in English. Two English-language traditional songs included “My Love is Like a Red Red Rose” and “What Do We Do With a Drunken Sailor?” Popular songs included a medley of Tom Jones’ hits, and also “Bridge Over Troubled Water,” “MacArthur Park,” and “Kissed By A Rose.” There were several examples from music theater, one of which was “Hello Dolly,” featuring a female soloist, who also sang a few numbers on her own. This is exactly the format that older MVCs in Northwest Wales use: concerts feature a soloist—often female—who sings solos in between selections by the MVC.

In addition to a similar format, *OMA* and the older MVCs I observed also have similar repertoire overall, despite influences from *Only Men Aloud*’s commercial success and consequent obligations. Below is the track listing for both of *OMA*’s commercial albums:

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63 The group does perform its own arrangements. As such, *OMA*’s version of “Cwm Rhondda” is unique: it sounds (to me) to be South African-influenced with low bass harmonies; it is also accompanied by heavy drumming, and it features chanting, too. It is in English, but has some Welsh lyrics for part of it, which is fairly typical for this song. A woman I met at the North American Festival of Wales (see the following chapter) was discussing this song with fellow American *OMA* fans, and said she nearly “drove her car off the road” when she first heard this version of the popular Welsh hymn; she was so amazed and excited by it.
Only Men Aloud (2008)
All By Myself
Don’t Rain On My Parade
Angels
MacArthur Park
God Only Knows
Bridge Over Troubled Water
You’re a Lady
Cwm Rhondda
One Voice
Kiss From a Rose
Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas

Band of Brothers (2009)
O Verona
Total Eclipse of the Heart
Band of Brothers
Blaenwern (Love Divine All Loves Excelling)
Men of Harlech
Pearl Fishers
Ar Lan Y Mor
The Longest Time
My Luve is Like a Red Red Rose
Somebody to Love
Gwahoddiad
Scarborough Fair

While the first album does showcase mostly English-language, popular music, the second includes traditional songs—Welsh and others. Some, including “Gwahoddiad” and “Blaenwern,” are religious. The choir also performs classical music, and Welsh, English, and French languages are heard on their second record.

It is impossible to compare OMA to other MVCs without considering OMA’s contractual obligations that undoubtedly affect its repertoire choices. However, this is not unlike groups such as Maelgwn and Penrhyn, who sing less “crowd-pleasing” works as required for eisteddfodau. Thus, like any choir, OMA’s repertoire reflects its venues. Otherwise, OMA performs many of the same selections I heard from the other MVCs featured in this dissertation, songs like “Gwahoddiad,” “Cwm Rhondda,” “Ar Lan y Mor,” and “Men of Harlech.”

As with any choir, repertoire is governed primarily by the venue and the audience. Tim Rhys-Evans describes an arrangement of “Ave Maria” in seven parts, “very legato and really taxing to sing,” that he attempted for the BBC’s Last Choir Standing: “it went down like a cup of cold sick (laughs)...you know, there were other choirs singing two-

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64 OMA also has different accompaniment than the Northwest MVCs: a small modern orchestra of winds, brass, keyboards, instead of just a piano. However, this is not surprising given the difference in venue, which for OMA is a concert hall instead a small chapel or church.
part arrangements of Madonna songs, and I was told that they’d raised their bar and we’d dropped ours…” He admitted that since the BBC were the ones televising the show and paying for everything, “they could call the shots a little bit.” Similarly, Cefin and Rhian Roberts tailored their song choices to suit *Last Choir Standing*, even abandoning 80% of their repertoire, and curtailing how much they sang in Welsh. However, they see this adhering to a competition’s expectations as part and parcel of competing.65

One could argue that TV is causing these choirs to choose more popular songs over more traditional repertoire, but these televised competitions are like any other events: there are certain expectations or even requirements, and the choirs adapt accordingly. Moreover, MVCs were already incorporating show tunes before competitions like * Côr Cymru* and *Last Choir Standing* existed, so it may be more accurate to say that these shows might encourage an increase in—rather than cause—the incorporation of popular repertoire. Conductor Trystan Lewis explained to me how *Maelgwn Male Voice Choir*’s repertoire is chosen and why it varies so greatly:

Our repertoire changes to fit, and I think that’s very, very important. I remember one of our first concerts…we were competing in the National Eisteddfod, and one of the pieces was quite a contemporary piece by William Mathias….and it was quite complicated, six or seven parts, and a lot of dissonance, and the men didn’t take to it very well, but I slogged and worked hard. For a kind of an outing before the competition we took it to St. John’s, and it went down like a lead balloon! They didn’t enjoy it at all. So I think you’ve got to fit your repertoire to fit your audience—very important.

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Lewis went on to explain another nearly opposite venue, for which he only programs Maelgwn’s classical pieces—e.g., opera, oratorios—and no “songs from the shows” at all.66

That said, audiences’ increased exposure to choirs singing pop songs on televised choral programs may cause them to increasingly want this type of music, and associate it with Welsh choirs. All of my observations in the Northwest revealed that audiences loved music theater tunes in particular, so it is not surprising that these have become a staple of MVC performances.

However, the Welsh choral institution is full of highly-trained, highly-skilled musicians with interests in classical music. University training and competition in eisteddfodau—both staples of Welsh choral singing—help ensure that classical repertoire will not be wholly abandoned in Wales. Just as amateur-versus-professional debates raged in both the Golden Age of Welsh choralism and today, arguments over repertoire also have roots in the past. At the start of the twentieth century, Welsh choirs were being criticized for their narrow repertoire,67 and this lack of variety was blamed for eisteddfodau losses to English choirs (Gareth Williams 1998: 146-149). Even from within the Welsh choral institution, trained musicians lamented the decreasing quality of eisteddfodau repertoire. D. Emlyn Evans opposed competitions where “soloists are allowed to wander at their own sweet will from “Pop Goes the Weasel” to a Handel aria” (Gareth Williams 1998: 163).


67 This was also an issue among the Welsh-descended Americans and their choirs during this period. See “Music Culture in Wales,” The Cambrian, Vol. 30, No. 17 (1910): p. 7.
In sum, the increase in popular repertoire is part of the reinterpretation of Welsh choral singing. However, it is a phenomenon that is not unique to the present: Golden Age choirs were accused of making similar changes, and many felt this was done to their detriment. Repertoire still depends on the requirements of the venue, and technically-difficult classical works still comprise a large part of Northwest Welsh choirs’ repertoire. The latter co-exist with traditional Welsh tunes in both simple and complex arrangements. Pop songs, and music theater songs in particular, are abundant.

The changes described in this section—specifically, the glamorization of Welsh choirs, with the increasing addition of popular repertoire and choreography—represent reinterpretation that is a result of changing sociohistorical factors, including the development of the Welsh-language entertainment industry in Wales. However, rather than replacing more traditional forms of Welsh singing, these “flashier” elements merely supplement them. It is true that some lamented to me that the Welsh choral institution was becoming too focused on pop music and too influenced by media. This fueled fears of image being emphasized over vocal quality. However, a wide range of styles seems to co-exist in the Welsh choral institution today.68

New choirs will not replace more traditional MVCs in the Northwest. Maelgwn will not start dancing, and Llandudno audiences will continue to come out to hear what has become traditional Welsh MVC singing: a mix of Welsh and English traditional,

classical, and pop music—with plenty of show tunes. Wales need not lament the loss of its Golden Age of choral singing. The form of some choirs has changed—especially the MVCs, whose members are now older and not as connected by employment as their Golden Age predecessors.\textsuperscript{69} The functions of MVC membership also seem to have shifted from fiercely competitive musicianship to the need for socializing and making friends. Many MVC interviewees are less concerned with musical prowess and more focused on enjoying each others’ company. Conversely, the glamorization of Welsh choral singing may prove to increasingly affect why young people join choirs, but future research is needed to confirm this; after all, friendship still outweighed all other reasons for Glanethwy singers’ memberships. And even though other Welsh institutions that helped spawn the Welsh choral institution—e.g., the chapel, the mining industry—are fading away, choir remains strong.\textsuperscript{70}

As for the future of the institution, it is too soon to tell if OMA’s success will encourage more young, all-male groups to form.\textsuperscript{71} Now that MVCs are no longer the

\textsuperscript{69} Trystan Lewis explained to me that with the chapel as their social focal point, Welsh choirs of the past often just formed to compete in eisteddfodau. He says of today’s choirs: “What I see is that the MVCs have become established groups, and it’s a kind of a social circle, as well as being singing, and in nine times out of ten, it’s more social than singing.” Trystan Lewis, interview by author, 15 May 2009, Siop Lyfrau Lewis, digital audio, Llandudno, Conwy, Wales. Interviewees’ responses corroborate his sentiments.

\textsuperscript{70} These observations concerning reinterpretation in the Welsh choral institution are in line with those of historians (e.g., Hobsbawm 1983) and anthropologists (e.g., Linnekin 1983, Waterman 1990), who have shown that traditions undergo constant reconstruction, and typically are more reflective of their current context than they are of any objective past.

\textsuperscript{71} Tim Rhys-Evans has recently founded Only Boys Aloud, a 200+ member choir of boys ages 14 to 19, comprised of ten separate choirs, each with an OMA member as their “captain.” “Choral singing was a waning tradition,” says Tim. “I wanted to do something to save it.” Virginia Blackburn, “The Boys Are Back in Tune,” The Daily and Sunday Express, 3 August 2010, www.express.co.uk/features/view/190814The-boys-are-back-in-tune (accessed 17 October 2011). Rhys-Evans told me of his plans to start this program at our interview in 2009; the group made their debut at the National Eisteddfod in 2010. There is one other young male choir of which I am aware, Black Mountain Male Chorus, who is described as the “youngest Male Choir in Wales with an average age of 25,” according to their MySpace page (http://www.myspace.com/blackmountainmalechorus) and Mumbles
result of co-workers joining together, and since other social outlets are available to working-age men, MVCs will most likely remain the domain of retired men. Trystan Lewis noted that people were making similar predictions in 2006, suggesting that the attention *Fron Male Voice Choir*\(^{72}\) drew to MVCs in Wales with their EMI recording would cause many new young men to join, but this just did not materialize. Likewise, conductors thirty years ago were lamenting that MVCs would not exist in thirty years’ time.\(^{73}\)

I cannot say whether or not this recent attention paid to MVCs in Wales—*OMA*’s high-profile success, as well as articles concerning the “demise” of the Welsh MVC—will change the form of the MVC, from the older, socializing choirs of today back to the younger, more competitive choirs of the Golden Age. It is doubtful that this will be the case, given the popularity of a variety of choir types in Wales, and the reputation MVCs now have of being older men’s choirs. But this attention is at the very least creating discussion about MVCs, and encouraging people to consider the MVC as an important sign of Welshness.

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\(^{72}\) This is the same choir Ian Herbert mentioned in his article about aging Welsh MVCs—this choir has only ten members out of sixty-five that are under the age of 40. *Fron* (short for *Froncysyllte*) is a choir born in the Monsanto chemical works, where at one time the entire choir worked, the last of which is now retired. Ian Herbert, “Welsh Male Voice Choirs are Singing the Blues,” *The Independent*, 8 July 2000, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/welsh-male-voice-choirs-are-singing-the-blues-710189.html (accessed 2 November 2008).

\(^{73}\) Trystan Lewis, interview by author, 15 May 2009, Siop Lyfrau Lewis, digital audio, Llandudno, Conwy, Wales.
Trystan Lewis corroborates the data in this dissertation that suggest MVCs in the Northwest function as a social activity, primarily for retired men. He says: “When I started conducting the MVC, I had something like six or seven young men, the same age as me. And they dwindled just because of course they had more work responsibility, engaged, got married, had children, etc., and they just couldn’t give the commitment. And that’s basically it.”

Four other members of Maelgwn also supported this view, telling me that young men “always” leave choral singing in their 20s and 30s—they themselves did the same; their hope was just that these guys would rejoin later in life like they did.

If it is true that singing in a Male Voice Choir in the Northwest is now a retirees’ pastime, it is not surprising then that so many new groups have formed in this area, since it has such a high concentration of older men. There are approximately eight or nine MVCs in a 20-mile radius surrounding Llandudno in Conwy County. Considering also the high proportion of retirees in this area, it is not surprising then that choirs are both older and have fewer members: there simply are not enough men to fill the plethora of choirs; at least, not enough to make 100-member strong choirs like in the former Golden Age.

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74 Even a group like OMA is not immune to this phenomenon: their website (www.onlymenaloud.com) recently noted that one of the group’s founding basses was leaving, as he just could no longer commit his time with his duties as a father, husband, and director of the Urdd Esiteddfod (1 July 2011, accessed 15 August 2011).

75 In my own fieldwork, there were five male teenage interviewees (from Glanaethwy) who discussed their interests in future choir membership. Two were interested in MVCs: one was already in, and the other plans to join when he graduates. A third male teenager was undecided between joining a Mixed or MVC in the future. Of the other two, one said he would join a Mixed, and the other a Gospel choir. All eight girls who specified what type of choir they would join in the future chose Mixed and not Ladies. These results suggest that Mixed choirs may someday be the most common and most popular of the Welsh choirs. Training might affect this—the desire to sing classical repertoire—both Rhys-Evans and Lewis were interested exclusively in Mixed groups for these reasons at the start of their careers.
To conclude, popular media in Britain may be helping to make choir “cool” for young Welsh singers, or at the very least, it has made choir a salient part of more people’s experiences of Welshness. It may also be inspiring new choirs, and encouraging existing choirs to add choreography and more popular repertoire to their performances. Reinterpreted as mostly just a social event for some, choir membership today can yield the opportunities of performing on television, and traveling.77 Perhaps by making the Welsh choral institution a bit more glamorous, the media will help ensure continued reinterpretation of a Welsh choral identity for younger generations. As shown above, all types of choirs and repertoire are part of Welsh media. With hymns sung by local, non-professional singers, big-money competitions with dramatic, dancing choirs, and eisteddfod performances of challenging classical works, Welsh television features an array of examples of the Welsh choral tradition today.

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76 Meurig Owen’s 2009 book on North Wales MVCs covers 25 choirs from the Northwest counties of Anglesey, Gwynedd, and Conwy alone. The male population in these counties is only 142,900, and this number covers males of all ages (including children) (population data from Rob Attenstaedt et al., “Review of Primary and Community Care Services Provided in North Wales: Population Profile of North Wales,” 29 March 2009, http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/Documents/837/pcc_population_profile.pdf (accessed 27 July 2011). Population data is from 2003; the latest census takes place in 2011, but the data will be unavailable until after this dissertation is complete. Projected population for North Wales in 2011 is 686,000). This document lists the ages of these counties’ residents, but the sex of the residents is listed separately. For instance, there are 296,800 people in these counties (142,900 males and 153,900 females). Another data set shows that 51,800 of the total are under the age of 16 (and so would not be part of any MVC). However, it is not clear whether or not the proportion of males to females (48.15% to 51.85%) holds true for all ages. If it does (and this is just an approximation using two different data sets), there are only about 117,968 men ages 16 and older in this region. Again, extrapolating from these two sets of figures, there are only 67,554 men in the typical age range for MVCs—ages 45 and older (48.15% of the total 140,300). In addition to these population documents, which show few choir-age men for so many choirs, my interview with Trystan Lewis also corroborated these sentiments (Trystan Lewis, interview by author, 15 May 2009, Siop Lyfrau Lewis, digital audio, Llandudno, Conwy, Wales. Lewis also noted that South Wales’ choirs tend to still have large numbers (90-100 men), but that few of these choirs compete, and as such, standards have suffered among some.

77 However, even for the Glanaethwy teens—who suggested musical skill, travel, and performing opportunities drive them to belong to their choir—friendship was still the most common reason for being in a choir.
New competitions in the media might explain why women and teen choir members see the institution becoming more popular, while the men witness their historically-salient choir type changing, and interpret this as destruction. In general, most people I spoke with see media exposure as a positive advertisement for the Welsh choral institution. Even the classically-trained musicians who generally do not like shows like *Last Choir Standing*, where choral competition is so bound up with image and the potential for negativity among competing choirs, suggested that the recent media exposure is good for choral interest in Wales.

This chapter describes the reinterpretation of Welsh choral identity. First, repertoire diversity is widespread among the choir types. In MVCs, show tunes and pop songs have increasingly been added in the past couple of decades. As in the early twentieth century, classically-trained singers lament this and strive for better standards. Televised choral programs—particularly with the addition of choreography—are glamorizing choirs, and one could argue that choirs are being appropriated by popular culture. And although this glamorization might be affecting why younger singers (e.g., *Glanaethwy* students) join choirs, other groups in Wales (like *Conwy*) are forming specifically to sing classical repertoire. Moreover, eisteddfodau requirements also continue to produce a need for challenging, classical repertoire.

S4C and Radio Cymru’s need for Welsh-language talent inevitably contributes to the reinterpretation process. These media also strengthen cognitive connections between Welshness and choral singing for Welsh and non-Welsh people alike. Moreover, the abundance of *Welsh-language* choral broadcasts may cause stronger connections between language, choral singing, and Welshness. Amidst all of this, the Welsh choral institution
remains varied and ubiquitous. Choral singing and Welshness are as inextricably linked as ever in Wales, and in the following chapter, I show how and where they are also bound together in North America.
CHAPTER VI: WELSHNESS AND CHORAL MEMBERSHIP IN NORTH AMERICA

The “Blank-Americans” and Welsh Migration to North America

Blank-American Identity: An Introduction

In the US, it is not uncommon to find people identifying themselves based on their non-American\(^1\) ancestry. This is particularly true in Youngstown, my hometown, a former steel producing city in northeastern Ohio. Here, in the beginning of the twentieth century, immigrants lived in enclaves with others from their home countries. Many generations later, their descendents still call themselves “Irish,” “Italian,”\(^2\) or the like, even though these ethnicities have been mixed with others. The creation of this cultural identity by the descendents of immigrants is what I call “Blank-American” identity, with the “Blank” being filled in with any immigrants’ culture name.\(^3\) While this chapter focuses on Welsh-American identities in particular, all Blank-American identities have particular traits in common with each other, as well as with any other cultural identity.

First, a group draws ethnic boundaries using associations or signs that are not necessarily dependent on ancestry, which is in part why the term “cultural” and not

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1 Although I use the term “North American” to discuss participants from both Canada and the US, I specifically use the colloquial term “American” for the latter, and “Canadian” for the former.

2 I have noted elsewhere (see Johnstone in submission and Johnstone 2011) that while “Italian-American,” for instance, is more accurate for Americans of Italian descent, people creating such an identity often do not add the “-American” part, and just say: “I am Italian.” Growing up in Youngstown, it was not uncommon to hear someone explain that they were “half” one ancestry and “one-quarter” another; many in the area are descended from early twentieth-century immigrants (e.g., Greek, Italian, Eastern European) and they know –and are proud—of these various ancestries.

3 As discussed in Chapter I, “Blank-American” also implies possible motivation for such labels. Specifically, it emphasizes the need for some Americans to use their ancestors’ origins—and accompanying cultural signs—as part of their markers of distinctiveness, due in part to the US being a young country and one founded by immigrants from various locations.
“ethnic” identity is used here. This is particularly common in Blank-American identity, since so many Americans are of mixed ancestry. I found ample evidence of this in previous research among Italian-Americans, as well as in the current research. For example, in the former, a group of Italian-American brothers proudly identified themselves as Italian-Americans, despite having Italian ancestry only on one side; the other parent’s Scottish ancestry was not noted in their views of themselves. In the present research, one self-labeled “Welsh-American” claimed to be “more than half German; about 1/16 Welsh,” and several others had no Welsh ancestry at all. Those in the latter group still value signs of Welshness as part of their own cultural identities (cf. Eisentraut 2001 and Wray et al. 2003).

Cultural identities also imply a sense of common geographic origins and/or connections to a geographic place among members of the group. However, as with ancestry, the connections are tenuous; in other words, experience with the country of origin—Wales, in the case of Welsh-American identity—is not a requirement for creating identity. In 2008, two Italian graduate students studying in Ohio were shocked by self-described “Italians” in the Youngstown area. The latter were young adults who were many generations away from any Italian immigrants, knew little of and had never visited

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4 As shown in this dissertation, ethnicity is often irrelevant. At the very least, it is a messy term. As Eugeen E. Roosens explains: “ethnicity can only be manifested by means of cultural forms that give the impression that they are inherent to a particular category or group of individuals.” A few emblems and values are used to draw social borders and separate people into groups (1989: 12, 19). As such, it is the cultural elements that are important in people’s markers of distinction, rather than their lines of descent. It is worth quoting Fredrik Barth again here (see also Chapter I): “we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences. The features that are taken into account are not the sum of ‘objective’ differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant…some cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored…” (1998: 14).
Italy, and could not speak any Italian; according to the graduate students, they even pronounced their own surnames “wrong.”

Similarly, many people featured in this chapter have never been to Wales, and even fewer speak Welsh. This is not to say that geography and language are not signs in their cognitive models of Welshness; on the contrary, both factors are stated as markers of Welshness. However, fervor for Welshness is the most salient sign in these data. As in Wales, musicality is also associated with Welshness in North America.

Understanding North American Welshness should begin by acknowledging that cultural identity is not static: it will be utilized when it is psychologically and/or socially advantageous in some way, and when it is suitable to a particular present context (cf. Robin Cohen 1997: 129 and Sandra Wallman 1998: 198). It was socially and economically advantageous for Welsh immigrants to not distance and distinguish themselves from the other British immigrants in North America in the nineteenth century. The question addressed by this chapter is how and why so many of their descendents fervently build a distinctively Welsh-American cultural identity today.

Several reasons for such identities among American descendents of immigrants have been suggested. First, unlike many immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their descendents can feel secure in their Americanness today; they do not have to prove their loyalties or defend their inclusion in American society. As such, they can more confidently assert their distinctiveness (Alba 1985: 7).

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5 I am not asserting that such pronunciations are objectively “wrong,” since language inevitably changes over time (see Croft 2007); rather, this was a point of contention for my Italian friends.

6 While this is true of many people (Welsh- and Italian-descendents alike), it is not true for every migrant group. Like other new immigrants before them, many Americans (e.g., Middle Eastern, Latino) still struggle with bigotry due to the sociopolitical context in the US today.
This may have been influenced by the Civil Rights movement, which sparked people’s interest in their own ancestry and caused Americans to think about their own distinctiveness (Richard D. Alba 1985: 7). Furthermore, a personal, individual need for belonging and self-definition, coupled with America’s youth and diversity, may drive people to seek deeper and older cultural roots. A more globalized and homogenized world might also be driving some to look for their own distinguishing characteristics.

Nevertheless, Blank-American identities are extremely varied, and reflect the socioeconomic contexts of the different groups of immigrants. For the Italian immigrants in America, it was beneficial to learn English and “blend in” as best they could; my own second-generation grandparents were strictly forbidden to speak Italian by their immigrant-parents in an effort to hasten their Americanization—fears about the mafia and potential Catholic loyalty to Rome made Italian-Americans a target of bigotry at the start of the twentieth century. It is the generations since the children of immigrants who fervently create and display Italian-Americanness.

The Welsh immigrants and their children also made efforts to blend in, but their situation was strikingly different. Many of them already spoke English and practiced a form of Protestant Christianity. Presenting themselves as something other than the mainstream would have most likely incurred bigotry among the paranoid nativists in the US. Instead, they thrived as part of the majority. Today, both Italian- and Welsh-Americans can proudly assert their ancestry and create cultural identities without fear of 

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7 See Alba 1985: 36-8, 62-3, 66-7 and Iorizzo and Mondello 1971: 36, 64-6, 75.

8 As noted in Chapter II, many of them practiced a denomination known as “NonConformist,” which emphasized its difference from the Anglican Church. Nevertheless, it is a form of Protestantism, akin to Methodism.

retribution. However, I must acknowledge that my experiences with the Welsh-Americans yielded few participants under the age of sixty. Further research is needed to determine potential forms and functions of Welsh-Americanness among younger North Americans.

By contrast, the previous research revealed that Blank-American identities are widespread among younger Italian-Americans—specifically, teenagers and young adults in their twenties and thirties. These younger participants were notably the most fervent creators of Italian-American cultural identities in their community. This may be due to the fact that unlike Welsh culture, Italian-American culture has been romanticized in the United States through countless television and movie portrayals. This is true of certain other Blank-American identities as well. For instance, Irishness in America is part of mainstream pop culture in part because of the popularity of St. Patrick’s Day. Comparatively, Welshness is not so well known, and as such, it is not so glamorous. This might explain the absence of young people participating in North American Welsh cultural events.

Obviously, there are exceptions to this. Young adults at Rio Grande University (southern Ohio) and Green Mountain College (in Vermont) have access to Welsh-focused activities at their respective institutions, as do school children in Jackson County, also in southern Ohio. There are young people participating in annual North American Welsh

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10 See for example the Godfather films (1972, 1974, and 1990) or HBO’s popular series The Sopranos (1999-2007): the former portrays several signs of Italian-American identity important to the Ohioans of Italian descent, including family pasta dinners, an annual festa, and a village band. Many interviewees in my fieldwork referred to the Godfather films as points of reference in describing their families’ experiences. The many achievements of Italian-Americans in the last century have changed outside opinions of group, but such pop culture icons have also helped to make being Italian-American something distinctive and even preferable.

11 The Spanish pronunciation is not used for this name; instead, it sounds like “Rye-o Grand.”
events, but their numbers are few. At the 2011 North American Festival of Wales, there were children’s events planned but then cancelled, presumably due to lack of attendance. A handful of young people accompanied older relatives at one of the sessions on traditional dance at this festival, and some competed in the eisteddfod, but all in all, I was noticeably one of the youngest people there both years I attended—I was 32 years old at the festival in 2009 and 34 in 2011; many people remarked to me that they were surprised to see “such a young person” at the festival.

Although Welsh culture is not salient in North America, general interest in the mythology and history of the British Isles in general is commonly found in the US. This is evidenced by the popular Medieval and Renaissance Faires held throughout the country, complete with their interesting blend of Celtic symbolism and Victorian costumes. However, even among these crowds, Welshness is not singled out. Therefore, without mainstream “advertising”—popular media portrayals, wildly popular holidays—Welshness is scarce among younger North Americans.

The focus in the following sections of this chapter is on the signs that are part of self-proclaimed Welsh-Americans’ cognitive models. In particular, the research for this chapter aimed to discover if Welshness is associated with choral singing on this side of the Atlantic, and what other signs are valued. Below is a brief introduction to the arrival

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12 There was one youth event (a recitation) and there is a winner listed online, but it is not clear how many competitors took part in this.

13 This is reminiscent of Juliette Wood’s explanation of how Celtic imagery has only recently been incorporated into Welsh souvenirs (in the past 30 years). She tells of one instance where such items were on display along with the typical romanticized Welsh symbols, items bearing imagery from the nineteenth century, as discussed in Chapter II: the Welsh-speakers identified more with the latter, having had relatives who owned similar items, while the English-speaking—primarily American—students were more familiar with the Celtic images (1997: 99).
of the Welsh in North America, followed by a discussion of Welsh musical activities and perceptions of Welshness from singers in Canada and the US. It should be noted that the data set in this chapter is much smaller than that from Wales. However, this North American Welshness is the focus of planned future research, and this chapter sets up the framework for future projects.

**Welsh Migration**

The Welsh arrived in the US as early as the seventeenth century. The greatest influx came in the period from 1840-1900. In 1850, there were 30,000 Welsh-born in the country, but almost three times this number—100,079—by 1890 (Robert L. Lewis 2008: 6).\(^{14}\) This movement corresponds to an era when many Welsh institutions were at the peak of their popularity in Wales, including Nonconformist revivals and religious fervor, a standardized National Eisteddfod, cymanfoedd canu and tonic sol-fa, and community choral singing. By 1900, the Welsh were in every state across America, but not evenly distributed. Over half of all Welsh immigrants and their children in the US were in Pennsylvania and Ohio.\(^ {15}\) They were instrumental in the industrialization of America, transplanting their skills in coal mining, iron, and steel to their new country. They earned—along with their English and Scottish co-workers—the highest wages in these industries (Lewis 2008: 47-8).\(^ {16}\)

\(^ {14}\) Lewis suggests that actual numbers may be closer to double these figures.

\(^ {15}\) Of the 267,160 (93,744 immigrants and 173,416 children) in the US in 1900, most were concentrated in Pennsylvania (100, 143). Ohio had the second-highest Welsh population with 35,971 (Lewis 2008: 8, 48, 61, cf. Pohly 1989: 9).

\(^ {16}\) The percentage of Welsh workers who resumed their old occupations in the US is one of many factors that set them apart from other immigrant groups. The British as a whole had a much higher proportion of workers who stayed in the same industry after immigration than any other immigrant group.
The Welsh migrants in Canada were fewer and later than those in the US. As in the US, many more Scots and Irish arrived in Canada, fleeing economic hardships back home. Furthermore, census records were often incomplete; there is evidence that Welsh immigrants’ home country was listed as “England” upon arrival in Canada. Nevertheless, Welsh settlements developed, with settlers coming from Wales as well as from other areas, including the US and South America.

By the end of the nineteenth century, there was a fervent campaign to target and attract Welsh settlers to Canada. The Canadian government subsidized ship fares, encouraging Welsh miners and other workers to settle in particular parts of the country. Free land was given in the 1870s-1880s, attracting Welsh farmers. Land grants and cheap farmland were offered by both the government and the Canadian Pacific Railway.

A report by the US Immigration Commission from 1907-1910 shows that 88% of Welsh-born coal miners had been coal miners also in Wales, and 72% of iron, tin, and steel workers also succeeded in continuing their trade in the US (Lewis 2008: 47-8).

Historical information about Welsh migration to Canada in this section is taken from Carol Bennett, In Search of the Red Dragon: The Welsh in Canada (Renfrew, Ontario: Juniper, 1985): 25-6, 40-5, unless otherwise indicated. Although the Welsh built settlements in Canada in the nineteenth century, peak migration was not until the first half of the twentieth century, particularly 1901-05, 1923-30, and following World War II. See also The Encyclopedia of Canada’s Peoples, s.v. “Welsh,” http://multiculturalcanada.ca/Encyclopedia/A-Z/w1/2 (3 October 2011).

The inconsistencies in determining Welsh ancestry in the census continued in the twentieth century. For example, from 1961 to 1971, the number of Canadians with Welsh ancestry fell by nearly a half, since many were recorded as “British” in 1971. The numbers fell again in 1981, when the criterion for Welsh ancestry was descent from the male line. In 1991, when the census added a self-declaration of ethnic origin, the 1981 number nearly quadrupled—28,190 claimed to be of wholly Welsh origins, and 169,665 of partial Welsh ancestry. The Encyclopedia of Canada’s Peoples, s.v. “Welsh,” http://multiculturalcanada.ca/Encyclopedia/A-Z/w1/2 (3 October 2011). It is unclear exactly how other sociohistorical factors—late twentieth-century Welsh nationalism, for instance—affected these numbers; in other words, is it primarily problems with terminology (British versus Welsh), or is it renewed fervor for Welsh identity that caused such an increase? The unnamed author of this entry notes that in the early twentieth century, many preferred to be called English instead of Welsh “for a variety of social, political, and occupational reasons.”

There is a well-documented Welsh settlement in Patagonia, founded in the 1860s (see Glyn Williams 1991). It was from here that many Welsh descendents came to Canada. It is noted below that some of these Patagonian Welsh descendents founded Ninna (We also), a Welsh-interest newspaper, in the US in 1975 (Bennett 1985: 169).
However, Wales’ own booming industries meant that relatively few Welsh people needed to accept such offers.⁰

It is worth noting that the Welsh left not in desperation—as did the Irish, and many other immigrants groups—but instead, they were seeking new opportunities to practice their trades. This produced a unique experience for them in America (Lewis 2008: 49). The Welsh immigrants’ social status and available opportunities upon arrival were markedly different from those immigrants from other areas of Europe. Hailing largely from the South Wales valleys, particularly from 1861-1900, they came with experience in skilled labor, which was welcomed into the United State’s own industrial revolution. These immigrants could return home to Wales’ own booming economy if they were not successful in the US (Lewis 2008: 45, 49-50).

However, the Welsh were extremely successful and economically mobile in the US. They moved into managerial jobs as immigrants from southern and eastern Europe moved in to take the low paying work. It is true that fewer Welsh came than did English, Scottish, or Irish, both numerically and as a percentage of their population. However, as Lewis points out, Wales’ small size means that not many immigrants were needed to form a notable presence. The Welsh immigrants also maintained connections to their former communities back in Wales, and they had the means to return and visit; as such, Welsh-American towns were well known in Wales (Lewis 2008: 46, 48-49, 105).

Various socioeconomic factors contributed to the Welsh immigrants’ assimilation and cultural diffusion in mainstream North America.¹¹ These included the Welsh

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immigrants’ labor skills, language abilities, and religious affiliations (cf. Lewis 2008: 5-6, 92-3). Many Welsh signs disappeared in the absence of the discrimination and economic limitations faced by other immigrant groups. Moreover, it simply would not have made good economic sense for the Welsh to distinguish themselves from the larger British population.

By contrast, the Italians endured decades of discrimination that undoubtedly played a part in their desire to take solace in and protect their distinctive cultural signs. Consider that by 1930, the Italians had the highest proportion of non-citizens and of non-English speakers of any immigrant group (Richard D. Alba 1985: 16, 54). By comparison, the Welsh had the highest proportion of fully naturalized citizens. By 1920, 72.9% of Welsh-born immigrants were US citizens, while the combined average for all other countries was just 47.2% (Ronald L. Lewis 2008: 92-3).

Thus, while other immigrants were being marginalized, the Welsh were seen as “valuable reinforcements” to the British majority in the US (Lewis 2008: 5). Lewis suggests that in one generation, Welsh-Americans became just “Americans” (2008: 8-9). A similar phenomenon is noted for the Canadian Welsh. For example, the Saskatchewan Welsh settlement is noted to have “failed as a cultural entity within one generation.”

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21 Some (see Peter Blau and Herbert Gans in Richard Alba 1985: 4, 14-15) have suggested that social and economic mobility weaken cultural identity because they are accompanied by acculturation (the forced acquisition of traits and values of another culture) and assimilation (the formation of primary intimate relationships across ethnic boundaries) (Alba 1985: 12). Assimilation and cultural diffusion are most appropriate here because the Welsh in many cases willingly blended in to mainstream American culture, and it is well-documented that distinctive Welsh cultural practices, including eisteddfodau and Welsh-language use, virtually disappeared in the US by the 1940s (cf. Magda 1986, Garrett et al. 2005: 533-4).

In sum, relatively fast assimilation and cultural diffusion meant that distinctive Welshness disappeared in much of North America within one hundred years of the Welsh immigrants’ arrival. Nevertheless, with so many fellow Welsh workers living in smaller—and thus, less diverse—towns, and because they had the means and desire to maintain strong ties with Wales, some did continue to use a few distinctively Welsh signs, at least for a while. The following section highlights the history of these Welsh signs, focusing primarily on their reinterpretation by later generations.

**Welsh Music in North America: A Brief History**

*Reinterpreted Traditions*

By 1700, one-third of the population of Pennsylvania was Welsh; however, records of Welsh musical activities here or anywhere in North America exist only as early as the 1850s. By far, the most common of these musical activities was the eisteddfod. Like eisteddfodau in Wales, American versions featured both English and Welsh languages and a repertoire that included Handel, Haydn, Mendelssohn, and Joseph Parry (Pohly 1989: 18, 92-4). Attendance of 12,000 was estimated at an eisteddfod in Philadelphia in 1879, and 14,000 in Scranton in 1902. The chart below shows how increasingly popular these events became in the US during the second half of the 1800s.

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23 Distinctive Welsh traits disappeared by the 1940s (cf. Garrett et al. 2005: 533-4); the most intense period of Welsh migration to the US began in the 1840s (Lewis 2008: 6).

24 The history of Welsh musical traditions in the US in this section comes from Pohly 1989: 2, 11, 14-17, unless otherwise indicated.

25 Information for this chart is compiled from Linda Pohly’s Appendix A, pp. 149-159. I kept her four categories: eisteddfod, gymanfa ganu, concert, and “other” (the latter she defines as “festivals, unions, conventions, etc.”). While Pohly’s data are obviously limited by the fact that only four states are covered,
Figure 25. Nineteenth-century Welsh-American musical activities in North America.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Eisteddfod</th>
<th>Gymanfa Ganu</th>
<th>Concert</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850s</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860s</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870s</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880s</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890s</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>273</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>69</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, Welsh-Americans’ nineteenth-century musical activities follow population patterns: Pennsylvania tended to host more events than Ohio, Kansas, and Wisconsin. The only exception was in the “Other” category; Pennsylvania had the fewest of all the four states, but it still held the most events overall, followed by Ohio. In all, more than half of all nineteenth-century Welsh musical activities happened in Pennsylvania.

these four states do provide a useful sample of Welsh-America in the nineteenth century, given the proportions of Welsh immigrants in places such as Pennsylvania and Ohio, where over half of the Welsh population of the US lived in 1900 (Lewis 2008:6). Pohly chose Wisconsin and Kansas as later, smaller, and more concentrated population centers. New York and Illinois also had significant Welsh populations (Pohly 1989: 9). According to Lewis, four of every five Welsh immigrants lived in Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, or Wisconsin in 1880. In 1900, two out of every three Welsh-Americans lived in just five states: Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, New York, and Minnesota (2008: 8, 48), representing three of the four (Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Wisconsin) from Pohly’s sample data.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>PA</th>
<th>OH</th>
<th>WS</th>
<th>KS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eisteddfod</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymanfa Ganu</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concert</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both Wisconsin and Kansas had early eisteddfodau (1850s and 1860s); but these events were not nearly as common here as they were in the other two states. For instance, there were eleven eisteddfodau in Pennsylvania alone in 1889, and twelve in 1896! Eisteddfodau far outnumbered any other Welsh musical activities across all states—only in Kansas were there more other events than eisteddfodau. Only eisteddfodau increased each decade as the century progressed. Gymanfoedd canu were the least common musical events; notably, there were actually fewer of these than of any other type in all states.

There are two claims for the earliest gymanfa ganu in the United States: 1838 or 1853 (Pohly 1989: 14, 38). The earliest recorded in Wales is either 1830 or 1859 (cf. Gareth Williams 1998: 26). Pohly believes the one in Pennsylvania in 1853 is credible. This suggests that the earlier date (1830) might be the correct one for Wales, or maybe the Welsh migrants practiced this activity in the US before their Welsh counterparts did in Wales, but neither of these possibilities can be confirmed. What is clear, however, is that North American cymanfoedd canu did at least develop early—if not concurrently with the Welsh versions—in the history of Welsh cymanfoedd canu.

Despite cymanfoedd canu being relatively scarce in North America, religious fervor was carried to the US with the immigrants. There were only forty-six Welsh congregations here in 1839, but more than 400 by 1872, and 500 by 1890 (Pohly 1989: 112, 144). Tonic sol-fa, which in part helped increase the popularity of hymn singing in
nineteenth-century Wales, was also used early in Welsh-American history: it appeared as early as the 1880s in the US, and it was only introduced in Wales in the 1860s (Gareth Williams 1998: 32, cf. Pohly 1989: 108-9). Still, religious fervor in nineteenth-century Wales and the increase in Welsh chapels in the US were not enough to make the gymanfa ganu a common American Welsh activity; eisteddfodau and concerts were far more popular.\footnote{American eisteddfodau grew in size in the period from 1860s to the 1880s, perhaps inspired by the standardization of the National in Wales in 1880. In 1865, a Gorsedd of the Bards ceremony was added to an Ohio eisteddfod, and also to eisteddfodau in 1885 and 1893. However, this tradition was not widespread in America (Pohly 1989: 39-40). Pohly calls this an “ancient druidic rite reintroduced in Wales in 1792,” but as described earlier, this ceremony can more specifically be described as a ritual created by a Welshman in London in 1792 to emphasize Wales’ Celtic past. It was added to eisteddfod events in 1819, and has been part of all Nationals since the event was standardized in 1861. See National Eisteddfod, “Gorsedd of the Bards,” http://www.eisteddfod.org.uk/english/content.php?nID=43 (accessed 27 September 2011). Notably, there was also an increase in choir concerts in the US, particularly for St. David’s Day celebrations, in the latter part of the century (Pohly 1989: 45).}

It seems that Welsh-Americans were generally interested in the current musical activities of their homeland. They made efforts to perform music that was currently popular in Wales, including pieces by Handel, Haydn, and Mendelssohn. More than one-third of Brinley Richards’ popular Songs of Wales were performed in America in the nineteenth century (Pohly 1989: 90-93). In April 1900, the Scranton Republican listed “important musical works” performed over the previous month in Wales (Pohly 1989: 94). Tastes in repertoire for American cymanfoedd canu were also similar to those in Wales, at least in the nineteenth century.\footnote{Pohly examined the twenty-six most frequently published hymns from a sample of eleven nineteenth-century hymnals found in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, Kansas, and the American collection at the National Library of Wales. She looked at approximately one hundred copies of thirty-six different hymnals, and based her smaller sample on the number of copies of each found in the four states. Sixteen of these twenty-six hymns were Welsh (traditional melodies or by known Welsh composers); included among the others were Italian, French, Scottish, and American songs, the latter by Lowell Mason. By 1887, the hymnals published in the US contained the same twenty-six hymns as those hymnals published in Wales from the 1860s to the 1890s, and in London in 1895. There were only one to three exceptions; that is, between one and three songs of the twenty-six were missing from just three of the hymnals. Pohly 1989: 113, 121-2, 123-5, 239-241.}
The Welsh-Americans also made some efforts to continue the use of the Welsh language in these activities. According to Pohly, Welsh was part of chapel services in the second half of the nineteenth century, and both English and Welsh were used in eisteddfodau (1989: 23-4, 112). Notably, the eisteddfod at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893 featured not only a gymanfa ganu and a concert, but also competitive penillion singing in traditional clothing; the page in the program describing the latter was printed in Welsh (Pohly 1989: 73-4).

There is evidence, however, that Welsh language use was diminishing in musical events in the US, just as South Wales was being Anglicized across the Atlantic. A newspaper ad for a Pennsylvania eisteddfod in 1879 announced the upcoming event, adding “if you know what that is.” The article also noted that most of the singing would be in English. Other eisteddfod announcements show that language choice was up to the singers (Pohly 1989: 24). In Wisconsin, a Welsh music union held “concerts in English” as early as 1867 (Pohly 1989: 59). Hymnals published after 1880 show a growing preference for English texts (Pohly 1989: 121).

In sum, the Welsh in the United States practiced some Welsh musical activities—particularly eisteddfodau—in the nineteenth century. There is also evidence of eisteddfodau and possibly cymanfoedd canu in Canada in the early twentieth century.29

28 Anglicization among the Welsh-Americans presents problems with the historical data: for example, the description of one music union’s event in Wisconsin in 1880 sounds like it could possibly be a gymanfa ganu, but the Welsh term was not used (Pohly 1989: 57-60).

29 Carol Bennett suggests that the Welsh migrants in Canada “kept their culture alive by singing in the chapel and the local eisteddfod,” but she does not give specific dates or specific events (1985: 152, 24). The Encyclopedia of Canada’s Peoples states that eisteddfodau and “singing festivals” were practiced in Saskatchewan until 1938. It is unclear whether or not the latter is referring to cymanfoedd canu. In another source, “group singing” is used in a similarly indeterminate way, Alberta Online Encyclopedia, s.v. “Welsh,” http://www.abheritage.ca/albertans/people/welsh.html (3 October 2011). In yet another online source, it is noted that eisteddfodau were held at the beginning of the twentieth century, with no mention of cymanfoedd canu (The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, s.v. “Wales,”)
In addition to repertoire, there are suggestions that other issues—including the amateur versus professional debate—were also carried from Wales to America (Pohly 1989: 23-4, 142). In the twentieth century, repertoire choices in the US increasingly deviated from their Welsh counterparts.

In the following sections, I show how—in addition to changes in preferred repertoire—interest in particular Welsh-American musical activities has drastically changed since the nineteenth century. There are some limitations here: one, research on the topic of Welsh-American musics is extremely limited,30 two, Pohly’s research focuses only on the nineteenth century, and three, my own fieldwork on Welsh-American musics is in its infancy. However, what is clear is that today, eisteddfodau are relatively rare in North America, and cymanfoedd canu are the most common Welsh musical activities (cf. Pohly 1989: 31).31

Did the religious revival in Wales in 1904-190532 spark a renewed interest in hymn singing—and thus, the gymanfa ganu tradition—in North America? Why was there such a drastic drop in North American interest in eisteddfodau? More research is necessary to answer these questions. Below, some North American Welsh activities are


30 In addition to Pohly’s unpublished dissertation (Ohio State University, 1989), there is one other dissertation specifically on cymanfoedd canu in the US (Patricia Bowers Schultz, University of Missouri, 1984). There is also an earlier Master’s thesis on the latter topic, also from Ohio State (Wendell M. Jones, 1946). James Cassarino, director of the Welsh-focused choirs of Green Mountain College, is currently conducting research on Welsh-American hymn singing (personal communication, 2010).


32 As discussed in Chapter V, this religious revival caused other activities—including community choirs—to be suspended. For example, the MVC in the village of Rhosllannerchrugog was suspended because of the revival, but reconvened 1908-1910 (Owen 2009: 196).
examined to explain the increasing interest in cymanfoedd canu, and most importantly to shed light on present-day Welshness in North America.

*The North American Festival of Wales and the National Gymanfa Ganu*

In addition to musical activities, the Welsh in North America formed clubs and mutual aid societies dedicated to preserving their heritage. The first in Canada is thought to have been the Cymmroddorion Society of British Columbia, founded in 1860 (Bennett 1985: 157). Older still—by well over a century—is the Welsh Society of Philadelphia, which was founded in 1729.33 Carol Bennett lists thirty such organizations still in existence in Canada as of 1985 (157-8). Forty-nine are listed for the US on the website of the Chicago Tafia Welsh Society, which was founded in 1999 as an aid to Welsh expatriates.34

The Welsh immigrants in North America were also served by periodicals in their native language, the most popular being *Y Drych (The Mirror)*, founded in 1851.35 It was published in the Welsh language until the 1940s, and then it continued in English. It was absorbed in 2003 by *Ninnau (We also)*, a Welsh-interest newspaper founded in 1975 by

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34 Chicago Tafia Welsh Society, “Welsh Connections,” http://www.chicagotafia.com/welsh-connections/ (accessed 6 October 2011). This group also lists Welsh-owned businesses, and a few rugby clubs and choirs, all by state.

35 There were several papers serving the immigrant community, including *Cymro America, Y Wasg, Baner America, Y Cenhadwr Americanaidd, Y Cyfaill, Y Wawr*, and *Y Columbia.* *The Cambrian,* referred to in subsequent sections of this chapter, was an English-language paper, published from 1880-1919, first in Ohio and then in New York. *The Cambrian,* http://ohiocambrian.llgc.org.uk/index.html?lng=en (accessed 15 October 2011). Carol Bennett notes that there was a nineteenth-century Welsh newspaper in Canada, but that it was “short-lived.” She does not give any further details. Another journal, called *The Welsh Pioneer,* existed in Winnipeg only in 1910. Bennett adds that many Welsh-Canadians subscribed to the American *Y Drych* (1985: 169).
Patagonian Welsh immigrants in the US (Bennett 1985: 169). Today, Ninnau features Welsh events in Canada and in the US, news from Wales, and genealogical information. Its Y Drych section features essays and reviews of books and music recordings. Ninnau is completely in English.

Despite these other domains of Welshness, musical events continued to be among the most salient Welsh-focused activities in North America. Despite the popularity of eisteddfodau, it appears that the events declined in North America by the War years.\footnote{Matthew S. Magda, “Welsh in Pennsylvania,” Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1986, http://pa.gov/portal/server.pt/community/groups/4286/welsh/471948 (accessed 10 October 2011). See also subsequent discussion.} I have been able to find only one continuous eisteddfod in the United States from before WWII: the Cynonfardd Eisteddfod in Edwardville, PA, which just celebrated its 122nd annual event.\footnote{The Times Leader, Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, PA, “Winner of ‘Cynonfardd’ Eisteddfod Announced,” 21 May 2011, http://www.timesleader.com/community/Winners_of__lsquo_Cynonfardd_rsquo__Eisteddfod_announced_05-20-2011.html (accessed 9 October 2011).}

Jackson, Ohio had hosted “Jubilees” since 1863, and held their first official eisteddfod in 1875.\footnote{The information on Jackson, Ohio’s eisteddfod tradition comes from Jeanne Jones Jindra, “Little Cardiganshire: The Welsh in Southeastern Ohio,” Lecture, North American Festival of Wales, 3 September 2011 and The Jackson Eisteddfod: A Welsh Music Tradition in Ohio, http://www.jacksoneisteddfod.com/ (accessed 30 November 2011).} In 1922, the Southeast Ohio Eisteddfod Association formed here, whose purpose was to “preserve the Welsh language and the cultivation of poetry and music.” In 1928, they built the only American auditorium serving as a dedicated eisteddfod venue; this won them a chance to host a National Eisteddfod in 1930, bringing 10,000 people into Jackson, Ohio. They continued to host annual eisteddfodau until 1940.
During this time, the Southeast Ohio Eisteddfod Association also formed a school eisteddfod, created to accompany/precede the adults' event in Jackson; it continues to the present. It was mandatory for all students in Jackson schools from 1924-1974, but it is now voluntary. While it remains popular in the elementary school, only a few students from middle and high school compete. The adult event has never been reinstated. There is also a school eisteddfod at Carroll County Schools in Maryland, dating back to the 1920s. Both of these school eisteddfodau, in Jackson and Carroll counties, focus on vocal music exclusively.

There have been a few new events created in recent years that have been labeled “eisteddfod,” even though they differ even more than those discussed above from traditional Welsh versions of the competition. For example, since 2004, the Folk Society of New York has hosted an annual “Fall Weekend/Eisteddfod.” However, this event is not focused at all on Welsh music or poetry; instead, the name “eisteddfod” is used to evoke the gathering of traditional artists. According to the founder: “The Eisteddfod is an entertainment, it is an educational experience, it is a reunion of friends, it is a time to

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40 Viewing the list of 2011’s performers (23 musicians) reveals only two musicians with any reference to Welsh music: one singer and one harpist. Most perform a variety of traditional American styles (ballads, blues, etc.).
enjoy… This, then, is the point of the Eisteddfod—that it is a time and a place where the performers and craftsmen of the folk revival can meet and learn from one another.”

There is one other event called the Coal Creek Eisteddfod Literary Competition in Briceville, Tennessee; this is exclusively an essay/poetry contest for elementary school students. While it is designed to honor the Welsh coal miners who settled in the area after the Civil War, it bears little resemblance to a Welsh eisteddfod. However, it is notable that the winner of this contest is announced by a judge “dressed as an ancient druid and carrying a sword,” and the winner earns the honor of sitting in a “ceremonial chair.” This is undoubtedly a reference to the prestigious chairing ceremony for poets at Wales’ National Eisteddfod.

In addition to the eisteddfod at the North American Festival of Wales, I was able to find information for only two other American eisteddfodau that aim to promote Welsh identity and feature both music and literary competition. One is hosted by the Meriwether Lewis Memorial Eisteddfod Foundation of Oregon. Known as the West Coast Eisteddfod, it was established in 2009. Unlike the one in New York, this is specifically a celebration of the Welsh eisteddfod, albeit in a modern, Americanized

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43 I cannot say definitively that there are absolutely no other eisteddfodau in Canada or the US, but neither online searching nor contacts with various Welsh-American groups has yielded any information about the existence of any others.
form, including online as well as live competitions, and featuring singing, poetry, storytelling, and even comedy.\textsuperscript{44} The other American eisteddfod in the style of the Welsh versions is part of Welsh Heritage Week, which celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in 2010. Held in varying locations in the US and in Canada (and occasionally in Wales), the week features classes in Welsh language, Welsh literature, hymn singing, harp playing, and traditional dancing, and includes both a gymanfa ganu and a small eisteddfod. The latter also includes a chairing and crowning ceremony.\textsuperscript{45}

The diminishing interest in eisteddfodau gave way to an increase in cymanfoedd canu during the twentieth century. This was undoubtedly in part because a “national”\textsuperscript{46} gymanfa ganu was organized in Niagara Falls in 1929 by Ohioans of Welsh descent. By only the second event, an organization had developed that would become the Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu Association. To the present, this group stages the annual gymanfa, which has evolved to include a four-day festival called the North American Festival of Wales. The group also prints and distributes the hymnal used for this as well as for regional cymanfoedd canu. The group calls their annual gymanfa “the preeminent expression of Welsh culture, heritage, and the Welsh language in the United States and Canada.”\textsuperscript{47}


\textsuperscript{45} The brochure for the week states: “But remember, our eisteddfod is just for fun!” This is undoubtedly to prevent potential participants from feeling intimidated. Welsh Heritage Week, http://www.welshheritageweek.org/index.html, (12 October 2011).

\textsuperscript{46} It is listed as such, although “North American” would be more accurate, since it included participants from the US and Canada (the group has since changed its name; see below for further discussion).

\textsuperscript{47} Formed in 1930, the organization was originally called “The National Gymnafa Ganu Association of the United States and Canada” and changed the name to the Welsh National Gymnafa Ganu Association in 1951 (Stacy Evans, Director, Welsh North American Association, personal
Although the current research reveals major repertoire changes in the gymanfa ganu since its inception in 1929, the exact dates and reasons for these changes remain uncertain. An old edition of the Association’s hymnal (entitled *Favorite Welsh and English Hymns and Melodies*, dating from between 1930 and 1951) lists ninety-three songs, eighteen of which are noted as “melodies,” with seventy-five “hymns.” Several of these do not appear in the new edition (1995), which is a reformatted version of the 1979 Golden Jubilee Edition of *Welsh and English Hymns and Anthems*. Concerning the 1995 edition, the Association stressed “that only hymns and songs from the Jubilee Edition would be included…” (Preface, p. III).

Thus, the 1979 edition is a standardized set of tunes, excluding the following earlier favorites and containing sixty-five additions that were not in the earlier hymnal. The repertoire is now the definitive set for the National Gymanfa Ganu in North America. This modern hymnal excludes the following hymns from the older edition:

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48 This edition does not have a date on it, but it must have been published sometime after 1930 and before 1951, because it features the pre-1951 name of the Association on its cover (Stacy Evans, Executive Director, Welsh North American Association, personal communication, 2011). Former Executive Secretary of the Association Nelson Llewellyn of Warren, Ohio also suggests that it is most likely one of the original editions (Nelson Llewellyn, personal communication 2011).

49 Changes included putting the text—two Welsh and two English verses—into the score rather than below it as in earlier editions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Composer/Artist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atgof</td>
<td>Mendelssohn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaencefn</td>
<td>Merriel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clawdd Offa</td>
<td>Onllwyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come Dearest Lord</td>
<td>Prayer of Thanksgiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dymuniad</td>
<td>Precious Promise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eventide</td>
<td>St. Catherine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finlandia</td>
<td>St. Garmon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innocents</td>
<td>St. Stephen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahoning</td>
<td>St. Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manna</td>
<td>Sychu Dagrau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melita</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It also omits the following—notably non-religious—songs, all present in the earlier hymnal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Companion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ar Hyd y Nos</td>
<td>Mentra Gwen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cader Idris</td>
<td>Merch Megan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clychau Aberdyfi</td>
<td>Merch y Melinydd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codiad Yr Hedydd</td>
<td>Nos Galan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwenith Gwyn</td>
<td>Sospan Fach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwyr Harlech</td>
<td>Y Deryn Pur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hob y Derri Dando</td>
<td>Y Fwyalchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lili Lon</td>
<td>Yn Iach I Ti Gymru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llwyn Onn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

50 This is the melody “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing.”
As such, the modern hymnal appears to have omitted non-religious songs,\textsuperscript{51} with the exception of the national anthems (Welsh, Canadian, and American) and the patriotic song “America.” I have thus far been unable to find any information about how and why particular songs were chosen as the standard set, or specifically why the aforementioned melodies were excluded by the time of the 1979 edition. These changes in traditional repertoire for the gymanfa are not unlike the shift from eisteddfodau to cymanfoedd in North America from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries: both reflect an evolution similar to that of language change. Specifically, the current signs survive because of diffusion and the continued assigning of meaning, i.e., reinterpretation; however, the initial changes are volitional (cf. Croft 2007).

One of these excluded hymns (“Finlandia”) was among the songs recommended at the festival by the visiting Welsh conductor in 2009, who was astonished that it was not in the North American hymnal. It is unclear why it was omitted from the current set of traditional hymns (c. 1979), when it was part of the earliest set, as shown in the earlier hymnal (pre-1950s). However, now that it is no longer in the book, it is no longer a traditional feature of the gymanfa. “Please don’t take this the wrong way…” the visiting Welsh conductor began, as he implored the North Americans to learn this hymn, explaining that even though the tune was not by a Welsh composer, “words say so much…it’s really like our second anthem…learn it.” Although the tune is not of Welsh origins, this melody has been set with Welsh lyrics by the famous Welsh minister,

\textsuperscript{51} Nelson Llewellyn (personal communication) mentioned that there may have also been publications of traditional, non-religious songs, but I do not have any specific titles or examples. Thus, it may be that the Welsh-descended Americans separated religious and non-religious songs for publication over the past few decades, but there is not enough evidence to be certain. The music at the festival is clearly dominated by religious hymns, though there is evidence that non-religious Welsh music is becoming increasingly popular among the participants, just in the past 30 years (see below for further discussion).
nationalist, and language activist Lewis Valentine; it is known as “Gweddi dros gymru,” or “Prayer for Wales.” This conductor continued to tell the North American group that they were missing several cherished Welsh hymns.\(^{52}\)

Thus, it appears that by the 1940s in North America, the most popular cymanfoedd canu hymns were ones that were not on nineteenth-century lists, revealing that major repertoire changes had already taken place.\(^{53}\) On the other hand, some of the nineteenth-century favorites were still popular in Wales as late as the 1980s (Pohly 1989: 128-9). According to the two Welsh conductors referenced above, the Welsh-Americans are now “missing” some of Wales’ most important hymns. The disconnectedness between Welsh and Welsh-American Welshness in these examples helps again reiterate the fact that cultural identity is individual and context- and experience-specific.

While there is some evidence here that repertoire for the gymanfa portion of the national festival has stagnated since the standardized hymnal was published in 1979, there have been many other changes to the festival overall in this time. A regular, long-time participant suggested to me at the 2011 festival that there has been an increase of

\[^{52}\] My interview with another Welsh conductor who directed the North America gymnfa in 2007 revealed that even melodies that remain in the new edition of the North American hymnal are not necessarily equally valued or considered acceptable by the Welsh-Americans. In fact, he felt that the North Americans’ musics—hymn choices, in particular—were growing increasingly different from those of Wales. Hymn choices for the Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu in North America were a point of contention between this conductor and the organizers of the festival in 2007. The conductor felt that he chose a great set of typical gymana ganu hymns, but he encountered negativity about his choices and was forced to change the program. The Welsh-Americans began to deviate from the Welsh in their preferred hymns in the beginning of the twentieth century. It appears that the Welsh in Wales continue to add new “favorites,” while the Welsh-descended Americans continue to sing older generations’ favorites, presumably in an effort to retain continuity with their ancestors’ cymanfoed. It may also be that certain song meanings (e.g., “Finlandia” with a Welsh nationalist’s lyrics) are simply not as significant to the Americans as they are to the Welsh. However, it remains unclear why the hymnal was changed between 1951 and 1979. See the subsequent sections of this chapter for further discussion of this repertoire. It is shown that religious songs are the most salient song types representing Welshness in North America, so their importance here should not be underestimated.

\[^{53}\] It should be noted that several popular tunes were written after 1900.
interest in other Welsh elements apart from the gymanfa—e.g., pub songs, harp music—over the past thirty years. Mostly notably, an eisteddfod was added in 1994. Thus, this annual festival, which evolved from and around the gymnfa ganu, increasingly adds non-hymn singing events, and now even includes an eisteddfod.\textsuperscript{54}

In line with the changes listed above is the Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu Association’s name change in September 2011. The group voted to change the name from the Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu Association to the Welsh North American Association, thus eliminating the reference to the gymanfa in their title. However, they still host the festival and the gymanfa, and these events’ names remain intact. Their reasons were noted as follows in their Summer 2011 newsletter, \textit{Hwyl}: “Many people, inside as well as outside the Association, have difficulty with the meaning and pronunciation of “Gymanfa Ganu,” and the word “National” does not reflect our U.S./Canadian purview. The name proposed is “Welsh North American Association,” WNAA. Most important, the institutions of the North American Festival of Wales and the Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu would remain unchanged” \textit{(Hwyl}, Vol. 21, No. 4, 2011; 3). Their subsequent newsletter offered this explanation:

\textit{Over the years, the name \textit{Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu Association} has presented some problems. Aside from the difficulty some people have with pronouncing “Gymanfa Ganu,” foundations and corporations are reluctant, in many cases, to provide funding to entities with the word “National” in their names. Also, as most of our membership and operations cover the U.S. and Canada, which nation does “National” refer to?}

\textit{The new name settled on is Welsh North American Association, WNAA. In the age of Google searches, it is important that the first word in the title be “Welsh.”}

Next, “North American” better represents the two great nations where most of our members live. Finally, “Association” continues to represent our organizational structure.

Welcome to WNAA. As the parent organization of the NAFOW [North American Festival of Wales], we have adopted the familiar NAFOW dragon symbol, featuring the maple leaf and the stars and stripes, as the corporate logo, and the Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu will remain the central feature of the annual North American Festival of Wales.

(Hwyl, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2011: 1)

Despite all the reasons offered in these two issues of the Association’s newsletter, this name change may reflect other tendencies discussed here; most notably, the festival’s focus on activities beyond the gymanfa ganu. It may also contribute to—or at least, foreshadow—future changes in the focus on hymn singing in North America. Nonetheless, it is notable that the Association emphasizes the continued centrality of the annual gymanfa ganu, reassuring its members that despite the name change of the group sponsoring it, the gymnafa ganu—by far the most-attended of all the festival events—remains intact.

In sum, cymanfoedd canu are still fairly abundant in North America, particularly in states with historically large Welsh populations, such as Ohio and Pennsylvania. Some of these are continuous traditions (e.g., The Central Southeast Ohio Association of Welsh Congregational Churches celebrated their 139th in 2011, and Gomer, Ohio their 94th),55 and there are associations dedicated to staging these events in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Ontario. Additionally, festivals and St. David’s Day celebrations

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However, eisteddfodau are practically non-existent in North America, except for a few fragments and small versions created recently. In the twentieth century, interest in eisteddfodau gave way to a focus on the gymanfa ganu as the primary expression of Welshness in North America (cf. Linda Pohly 1989: 31, 39 and Patricia Bowers Schultz 1984).

There have been other efforts to practice and celebrate Welsh musical and non-musical signs in North America in recent years. For instance, events at Rio Grande University were noted earlier in this chapter. This university has an exchange program for Welsh students, faculty fellowships for those committed to research on Welsh history and culture, and archives of Welsh North America arcana (The Madog Center for Welsh Studies).57

However, a Welsh Studies minor—with courses in Welsh literature and British history and archeology, and an online language course—is the only available Welsh-focused part of their curriculum. It should be noted that this minor is currently not being offered at all, because it is being redesigned (according to their website, which is available for reading in Welsh). However, the minor is still listed in the university’s catalogs for 2009-2011 and 2011-2013. On the Rio Grande website, there is a questionnaire for ideas concerning the future incarnation of the Welsh minor. Proposed

56 See the Ontario Welsh Festival, which features concerts and two cymanfoedd canu, like the National Festival of Wales (http://www.onariowelshfestival.ca) and The Philadelphia Welsh Society’s procession and church service for St. David’s Day (http://www.philadelphiawelsh.org/html/activities-events.html). The latter also advertises several regional cymanfoedd canu in northeastern Pennsylvania.

57 The Madog Center for Welsh Studies at Rio Grande University grew out of the North American Association for the Study of Welsh Culture and History (NAASWCH), who held their first conference at the campus in 1995. The university’s Board of Trustees established the Center in 1996, and it moved to its present location on campus in 2002. The Center hosts the exchange program with students from Wales, and acts as a resource center/archives for Welsh culture in the local area and beyond. Rio Grande University-Madog Center for Welsh Studies, http://madog.rio.edu/ (accessed 12 October 2011).
classes include language classes, Welsh history classes, and classes focused on the Welsh in America.\textsuperscript{58}

Similarly, Green Mountain College in Vermont has a Welsh Heritage Program, established in 1995.\textsuperscript{59} The program’s history can be traced back to the 1970s, when the college received a grant to promote the revival of Welsh heritage in the local area. This grant led to a Welsh language course, a Welsh collection in the library, and eventually, the Heritage Program. At present, the college hosts an annual Welsh festival and an exchange program with the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. Most notable for this dissertation is the college’s choir and chamber ensemble, Côr y Mynydd Glas and Cantorion, established in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{60}

\textit{Welsh Choirs in North America}

Choirs have long been part of the Welsh North American experience. Undoubtedly, the popularity of the eisteddfod in the late nineteenth century gave choirs a context that allowed them to thrive. However, like the eisteddfod itself, Welsh-American

\textsuperscript{58} For example, participants are asked whether or not they are interested in the courses of the old minor (those listed above, which are also still listed in the course catalogs for 2011-2013). They are also asked their opinions on the ideas for the new minor; there is also a space for suggestions. Rio Grande University-Madog Center for Welsh Studies, http://madog.rio.edu/ (accessed 12 October 2011).

\textsuperscript{59} Utica College in New York also has a Welsh-American collection (along with Bosnian-, German-, Italian-, Jewish-, Lebanese and Syrian-, and Polish-American resources) as part of their Ethnic Studies Heritage Center. Their collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Welsh-language literature is the largest in the US. Utica College, “Welsh Americans,” http://www.utica.edu/academic/institutes/ethnic/welsh.cfm (12 October 2011).

\textsuperscript{60} Green Mountain College, “Welsh Heritage Program,” http://www.greenmtn.edu/about/welsh.aspx (accessed 12 October 2011) and Jim Cassarino, director, Green Mountain College music program, concert band, cantorion, and choir, 2010 (personal communication). The choir’s name is listed (as above) in Welsh on the Welsh Heritage Program link, but in English as the GMC Concert Choir and Cantorion on the music department’s page.
choirs seem to have diminished by the Second World War.\textsuperscript{61} This demonstrates that the effects of the war and the changing social landscape not only made an impact on Welsh choirs, but on Welsh-American choirs as well. It also suggests a possible symbiotic relationship between choirs and eisteddfodau.

While I am unaware of any research to date on Welsh choirs in North America (and thus unable to provide an exhaustive list of choirs), there are reviews of competitive choral performances—as part of eisteddfodau—and choir concerts in the US in The Cambrian, a magazine for Welsh-Americans published from 1880-1919. These reveal that all of the choir types found also in Wales, including Mixed, Children’s, Ladies, and MVCs,\textsuperscript{62} were found in the US during this period. Although not an exhaustive list, it shows that choirs were important to the Welsh immigrants’ musical events. It also reveals the abundance of mixed choirs, or at least their popularity at eisteddfodau. The second most-often mentioned type of choir was the MVC, followed by all-female choirs.

\textsuperscript{61} I base this argument on articles from The Cambrian, which note Welsh activities in the US from 1880 to 1919 (the whole collection has been digitized and is available through the National Library of Wales’ “Wales-Ohio Project,” http://ohiocambrian.llgc.org.uk/index.html?lng=en). It does not cover Welsh-Canadian events. Choirs are mentioned until just past the turn of the century, and by 1913, searching for the term “choir” in the collection yields no results. By the final year of publication (1919), the subject of choirs diminishing in Wales is discussed (Vol. 39, No. 3). I also notice praise for the development of “British” music (as opposed to specifically “Welsh” music) in these final volumes. I am calling choirs who are “Welsh-focused” in both repertoire and mission (i.e., promoting Welsh heritage) by a number of synonymous terms, including Welsh-focused choirs, Welsh North American/North American Welsh choirs, or specifically Welsh-American/American Welsh and Welsh-Canadian/Canadian Welsh choirs.

\textsuperscript{62} There were a few mentions of children’s choirs, but no specific choir names were given (beyond the director's, e.g., “John Morgan and party,” describing a children’s chorus from Girard, Ohio).
Figure 26. A selection of choirs competing in American eisteddfodau as reported in *The Cambrian*, 1880-1919, by choir type (locations are given where available).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mixed</th>
<th>MVC</th>
<th>Ladies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland United Choir</td>
<td>Rolling Mill Hill Choir</td>
<td>The Columbians (Kirkville, IA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirkville Harmonics</td>
<td>Sugar Notch Choir</td>
<td>Gwent Glee Club (Olyphant, PA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambrose Choral Society (Youngstown)</td>
<td>Southside Choir of Wilkes-Barre</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Blacksmith Glee Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral Ridge Choir (Mineral Ridge, OH)</td>
<td>Plymouth Choral Society</td>
<td>Cambrian MVC (Pittsburgh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngstown Choir</td>
<td>Cymrodorian Choral Society of Scranton</td>
<td>Wilkes-Barre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cymrodorian Choral Society (Hyde Park, PA)</td>
<td>Wilkes-Barre Choral Society</td>
<td>Tabernacle (Salt Lake City)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh Choral Society</td>
<td>Scranton Choral Union (1893)</td>
<td>Gwent Glee Club (Edwardsville, PA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnstown Choral Society</td>
<td>Western Reserve Choral Union</td>
<td>Iowa (Hiteman, IA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngstown Harmonics</td>
<td>Wilkes-Barre Oratorio Society</td>
<td>The Philharmonics of Granville (Granville, OH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massillon Choral Society</td>
<td>The Gwents (Utica, NY)</td>
<td>Cymrics of Utica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newburg Choral Society</td>
<td></td>
<td>New Castle (New Castle, PA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwalia Glee Club (Utica, NY)</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Gwents of Kingston (Kingston, PA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haydn Glee Society (Wilkes-Barre, PA)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Steubenville</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Today, there is only one MVC in the United States: We Are the Men, MVC Inc., in existence only since 2008 in Harwichport, Massachusetts. According to the choir’s website, its repertoire is not unlike that of the Northwest Welsh MVCs: this group performs hymns and other traditional songs in both Welsh and English, classical music, spirituals, sea shanties, etc. The choir does not, however, list music theater numbers, which are a staple of the MVC repertoire from Northwest Wales.

There are several MVCs in Canada at the present time, including The Burlington Welsh Male Chorus (Ontario), St. David’s Welsh Male Voice Choir (Edmonton, Alberta), Côr Meibion Cymraeg Montreal, Vancouver Welsh Men’s Choir, and The Toronto Male Voice Choir (the latter is featured in the following section). Only one of these groups has been continuously operating since before the 1960s.

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63 This is the only one of which I am aware, cf. James Cassarino, Green Mountain College Music Director, personal communication, 2010. This one was formed by a Welsh expatriate from earlier choirs in 2002, and re-started in 2004. We Are the Men, MVC Inc., http://www.wearethemen.org/about.html (accessed 15 October 2011).

64 Sea shanties are typically sea-related work songs. These are also popular among the MVCs in Wales.

Canada had just one mixed Welsh choir in recent years of which I am aware—*The Ottawa Welsh Choral Society*, established in 1972—but it is no longer operating due to lack of interest. However, a few mixed choirs have been created recently in the US. The oldest of these is the *Rohoboth Welsh Choir*, established in 1984, a group affiliated with a historically-Welsh chapel in Delta, Pennsylvania. In the 1990s, Green Mountain College in Poultney, Vermont produced the only college choir outside of Wales that focuses on Welsh—including Welsh-language—repertoire. In 1997, the *Welsh Choir of Southern California* was established.\(^6\)

Most unusual of all of the Welsh North American mixed choirs is *Côr Cymru Goledd America* (*The North American Welsh Choir*), established in 1998. A self-defined “community choir,” the group’s membership spans twenty-five US states and three

Canadian provinces. A website connects the far-flung choristers; here they can access practice tracks, lessons in Welsh pronunciation, regional rehearsal and concert schedules, and other important news. The group maintains an active performance schedule that has included South America, Wales, and many North American destinations.67

**North American Choral Welshness**

As with the singers in Wales, the intent here is to reveal singers’ personal perceptions of Welshness, including how choral singing might be bound up with these identities. This research also served to determine what songs are associated with Welsh cultural identities. Although this portion of the research is in its beginning stages, interviews and surveys reveal some notable patterns concerning Welshness among American and Canadian singers. The data in this section come from the following sources: eight participants from *The North American Welsh Choir*, twelve from *The Toronto Male Voice Choir*, and one from *The Green Mountain College Choir*. Insights described here obviously represent just a small, specific population of Welsh-focused68 choral singers. More extensive research is planned among these and other groups as outlined in the following chapter.


68 I call these choirs “Welsh-focused” since they perform music of Welsh origins and even with Welsh language lyrics. However, not all members of these choirs have any Welsh ancestral affiliations or necessarily a Welsh identity. This research is consistent with the research presented thus far in this dissertation.
Data Results: North American Interviews

One of the differences between the Welsh-focused choirs in North America and the choirs in Northwest Wales is the former population having a large number of people without any Welsh ancestry. Of the twenty-one interviewees from North America, eight have no Welsh ancestry. These singers are part of a Welsh-focused choir because of their love of singing, and/or their interest in Welsh musical traditions, even when the latter are not part of their own ancestry.

As in my previous research on Italian-American identity, I found that Welsh-American identities are a conscious choice, often based in part on some Welsh ancestry that is mixed with others. The majority of Americans interviewed called themselves either “Welsh-American” (four people) or “American of Welsh Descent” (two people). The final person was a Welsh expatriate that described himself as “Welsh;” he too has a mixture of ancestries—Welsh, English, and Irish.69

Not surprisingly, given how long the Welsh have been in North America and their historical socioeconomic status here, none of those who labeled themselves “Welsh-American” or “American of Welsh Descent” has exclusively Welsh ancestry. One called himself “7/8 Welsh” (having one English great-grandparent), another “3/4 Welsh,” and one “1/2 Welsh.” The others described Welsh ancestry as one among many others. It seems that ancestry is important if one has it: the idea of having a "high percentage" in one’s parentage (e.g., “My mother was 100% Welsh”) seems to be used as a point of

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69 Of the nine Americans interviewed, only two described themselves without a Welsh distinction, i.e., they do not use the term “Welsh” to qualify the term “American.” However, both have some Welsh ancestry—one uses the term “American” and the other jokingly calls himself a “Heinz 57 American,” referring to the abundance of ethnicities in his ancestry.
pride, to show that the person is potentially a better exemplar of the identity—this was something that also came up in my Italian-American fieldwork.

However, ancestry is not necessary. One can have very little—or even none—and still create the identity using something else (e.g., fervor). As noted previously, one proud, self-defined “Welsh-American” described his ancestry as “more than half German, about 1/16 Welsh.” Jocelyn Linnekin notes a similar finding in Hawai‘i, where Polynesian ancestry is emphasized over others, even when the latter make up the majority of the individual’s parentage (1983: 245, cf. Johnstone in submission).

Most of the Canadian interviewees—despite describing their ancestries as Scottish, Irish, and others—label themselves just “Canadian.” The exceptions were four expatriates, three of whom call themselves “Welsh-Canadian,” and one who calls himself “Welsh.” While it is not uncommon for Americans to make further distinctions to the label “American,” it is unclear why this need for a more specific label is not present among the Canadian respondents. For some this might be due to their ancestries being primarily British and therefore, not perceived by them as an “other,” but instead as the Canadian majority; however, this is purely speculation. It is equally possible that their families have been in Canada long enough, and not having had to defend their ancestry, they can assert Canadianess without a need to look further back unless pressed to do so. The one singer from Toronto who did qualify his Canadian identity is also learning the Welsh language because of his interest in the culture. Unlike his fellow choir members, he is not of this mostly-British majority: he is born of parents from Goa, a formerly-Portuguese controlled territory of India. It may be his experiences as an “other” in
Canada that drive him to emphasize his distinctiveness, as well as to have an interest in the distinctiveness of the Welsh (e.g., their language).

Whether or not the Welsh language is a factor in the participants’ Welsh identities was explored in this North American research. Among the Americans, two described themselves as non-Welsh speakers, while the remaining six have been studying Welsh—at least occasionally—since their 30s, 40s, or 50s, and the Welsh expat is a native Welsh speaker. Three out of the four Canadian Welsh expats were Welsh speakers; however, only one other Canadian interviewee is learning Welsh, and he has no Welsh ancestry. It appears then that language is valued and pursued as part of Welshness in America, though perhaps as a sign of Welshness without the function of usual communication; it appears only at particular occasions (e.g., Welsh Heritage Week, North American Festival of Wales). These annual occasions offer domains for singing in Welsh and taking beginning Welsh language courses. North Americans at Welsh-focused events show support for the Welsh language, even though for them personally it is not typically a communicative system, but instead a more abstract symbol of Welshness.

Despite the difference in language abilities between the Northwest Welsh and the Welsh North Americans, most interviewees from both American and Canadian groups

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70 The extent of their language abilities is unknown. I use the term “occasionally” because many described their experience as studying Welsh during “Welsh Heritage Week,” which is an annual intensive week-long “camp” for those interested in studying Welsh language and culture (including music). See http://www.welshheritageweek.org/.

71 This is the singer mentioned in the note above, of Goan heritage; he is the youngest participant from the Toronto choir.

72 Cf. Mike Cormack, 1998; see the following chapter for further discussion.
agree with the older\textsuperscript{73} Welsh singers that Welshness exists in degrees; that is, they suggest that some people are more Welsh than others. In all, sixteen singers answered “yes,” and several emphatically, to the question: “Are some people more Welsh than others?” Three other singers stated a non-definitive answer, using words like “probably” or “I’m not sure, but…” However, they gave reasons why they think there might be distinctions. Only two interviewees said “no” to this question: both were Americans, one of whom was Welsh-born. Once again, the perception of Welshness in degrees, as opposed to an exclusively “either/or” distinction, seems to be related to age: only the adults in this research seem to see Welshness in degrees, i.e., some people are more Welsh than others.\textsuperscript{74} These findings can be explained by general theories of cognition, where age and experience yield more complex cognitive models (Koch 2004, cf. Pachton and Perruchet 2008).

The North Americans’ reasons \textit{why} some people are more Welsh than others reveal that both language and geography are considered signs of Welshness, similar to those expressed in Wales. However, outweighing all other factors are suggestions that one’s own personal perceptions and efforts—which I have labeled “personal convictions”—makes one more Welsh. “Self-identification,” “spirit,” “attitude,” “importance,” and willingness to “demonstrate their commitment to things Welsh more openly” were among the descriptions of what determines the robustness of an individual’s Welshness.

\textsuperscript{73} Age and sex as social factors in the North American data are discussed in the following section of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{74} There is a caveat to this argument, since no teens were interviewed in North America; all Welsh-identity creators from Canada and the US were adults. As noted elsewhere, it is mostly only adults that have thus far been observed participating in Welsh cultural activities in North America.
These results are as predicted: due to the potential absence of plentiful common Welsh signs, including language, geography (i.e., not having been born in Wales), musical experiences,\(^{75}\) and even extensive Welsh ancestry due to decades of assimilation, the creation of Welshness in North America is perceived as being determined largely by zeal on the part of the individual. For example, consider the following quoted explanations from interviewees:

In many ways, I think being Welsh is more of a state of mind than anything. Understanding and feeling such concepts as hiraeth\(^{76}\) and the tradition of music are more important than your actual ancestry. ‘More Welsh’ can be defined as identifying as being Welsh, even if it’s just 1/100 or even none genetically. It’s more a state of mind, awareness, or self-identification.

Language is important but spirit is moreso.

I’d say that someone who is so greatly invested in a culture is a great and deserving member of that culture, while another who is not at all invested in that same culture isn’t necessarily a critical part of it. Given this, anyone who participates in Welsh culture is Welsh, while someone who is technically Welsh, but does not acknowledge this ancestry, is not, practically speaking, Welsh…the degree of Welshness is not merely technical, but practical.

\(^{75}\) These were the three primary signs in Northwest Wales. Because many North American interviewees mentioned more than one factor, there are more reasons given than the number of participants.

\(^{76}\) As described in Chapter III, “hiraeth” is a well-known Welsh term for “longing,” specifically with respect to a particular place and time. Often glossed as “nostalgia,” it is commonly used to describe Welsh people’s attachment to Wales and their experiences there.
In addition to an exclusive Welshness that exists along a continuum, the North American singers also parallel the Northwest Welsh singers in their perception of Welsh people as particularly musical. Only one singer (an expat) suggested that Welsh people are not particularly musical; the remaining twenty said that they are. More specifically, eighteen singers said “yes,” and two gave non-definitive answers, but both of these added a description of the Welsh as passionate singers. Furthermore, the reasons respondents offered as to why the Welsh are so musical were mostly related to singing. In all, singing was mentioned eleven times: six references to singing/vocal traditions were made, with five others specifically about choral singing; musicality as a historical/cultural phenomenon was mentioned four times; and the abundance of music opportunities in Wales was stated twice as reasons why the Welsh are perceived as particularly musical.

Despite the sharing of a Welsh choral identity, the North American singers differ slightly from the Welsh in their reasons for joining choir. In conversation, a few members of the North American Welsh Choir mentioned to me that they valued the great camaraderie and friendship offered by their choir. However, specific data on reasons for their membership were not collected from this particular choir. On the other hand, quantitative data on the function of choral membership was collected from the Toronto Male Voice Choir. Their responses are shown below:

77 One explains how “most Welsh people sing right from the heart, which could separate them from many others” and the other said: “I doubt if they are more musical than anyone else, but there is no question they love to sing.”
Figure 29. *Toronto MVC* interviewees’ reasons for being in the choir.\(^{78}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toronto (MVC) Responses</th>
<th>Love of Singing</th>
<th>Friendship</th>
<th>Upkeep of Welsh Traditions</th>
<th>Religiously/Spiritually Uplifting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown here, love of singing slightly outweighs all other reasons for choral membership. Second to this are friendship and a sense of maintaining Welsh traditions in North America. The North Americans with Welsh identities all suggested the latter as one of their reasons; however, they are not the only ones to see their choir functioning in such a way, even some without Welsh ancestry value the upkeep of Welsh signs.\(^{79}\)

Friendship is obviously important to the Toronto MVC. However, to these singers, choir also provides an outlet for their love of singing and for their desire to be a part of Welsh traditions. While the former function—love of singing—probably reflects the few choral opportunities for North American adults (after all, choirs are not so nearly abundant in North America as they are in Northwest Wales), the latter—maintaining Welsh traditions—might reflect the fewer opportunities these men have to participate in clear performances of Welshness—e.g., being in a Welsh-focused choir.

\(^{78}\) Unlike the Northwest Welsh interviewees, most members of the *Toronto MVC* did not give just one primary reason for being in the choir. Instead, only three gave just one reason, and the other nine all gave two (e.g., camaraderie and love of singing; one even gave three reasons). Thus, since all responses were tallied, there are more than twelve responses for just twelve people.

\(^{79}\) It should be emphasized that reinterpretation is present in North America as expected. However, using terms like “maintaining” and “upkeep” reflects the respondents’ views and descriptions.
Data Results: North American Surveys

This section focuses on songs as signs of Welshness among the North American singers. They participated in the same surveys administered to the Welsh singers in Northwest Wales, the results of which appeared in Chapter IV. As with the latter, a variety of songs chosen demonstrates the individual nature of cultural identity; yet patterns also emerge in the data, reflecting sociohistorical influences.

Not surprisingly, the types of song chosen most often to represent Welshness in North America differ greatly from those chosen in Northwest Wales. It is notable that the majority of the singers surveyed in North America fall into the oldest category used in Chapter IV, ages 60 and above. This group in Wales chose love songs, following by religious songs. In their data, nationalistic songs are barely represented. In North America, it is the love songs that are barely represented, while the most salient are religious—followed by nationalistic—songs.

Figure 30. Song types chosen by North American singers as signs of Welshness.

Songs as Signs of Welshness

Despite the difference in song types, the North American singers’ reasons for songs representing Welshness mirror those of the Welsh: lyrical content and the language
of the lyrics are important across all age groups. However, in North America, the song’s role in the singers’ personal memories was chosen as often as language, and even more often than language in the largest group of participants—those age 60 and above. Therefore, it is possible that Welsh-language lyrics are less personally significant to the North Americans than are their own memories of Welsh music performances. In other words, the Welsh language is not “theirs” in a communicative sense; as such, it follows that it might be a less central sign in their Welshness when it comes to songs.

A Comparison of Welsh and North-American Welsh Identities

Despite the notable differences between these data and those Welsh data presented in the previous chapters, the North American data can be discussed in relation to data from Wales. Specifically, the role of various sociohistorical factors can be assessed. However, the North American data are more limited than the Welsh data due the former’s smaller sample size. Moreover, the North Americans are much more uniform concerning both age and sex. As such, statistical tests used in Chapter IV are not used here to find correlations between age, sex, and song choices, as they would be irrelevant with such small numbers. Instead, description will suffice.

For example, the three females each chose one of the three different song types—one nationalist, one religious, and one love song. Concerning age, the singers in their 50s chose evenly two nationalistic and two religious songs, while the two singers in their 20s chose one of each, nationalistic and religious; the one in his forties chose a religious song. The remaining twelve singers—all aged 60 or older—chose song types

80 There were just three female participants in all, and twelve out of twenty-one singers were aged 60 and above, with six in their 50s, one in his 40s, and only two in their 20s.
representative of the overall data: the most chosen were religious (6), followed by nationalistic (4) and love songs (2).

As in Wales, the reasons for choosing songs as signs of Welshness are primarily lyrical content and the language of the lyrics. However, a song’s ability to evoke personal memories appears just as often as the language of the lyrics in North America, while this choice was not abundant in the data from Northwest Wales. See the figure below for comparison:

Figure 31. Reasons why a song represents Welshness and percentages of the totals for each group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Responses from Northwest Wales</th>
<th>Responses from North America</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A – evokes personal memories</td>
<td>15 10%</td>
<td>8 24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B - what the lyrics are about</td>
<td>48 32%</td>
<td>11 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C - the composer/songwriter</td>
<td>18 12%</td>
<td>3 09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D - the performer(s)</td>
<td>11 07%</td>
<td>2 06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E - the language of the lyrics</td>
<td>46 31%</td>
<td>8 24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F - importance to my family</td>
<td>12 08%</td>
<td>1 03%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results might reflect some basic differences between perceptions of Welshness in Wales versus those of the Welsh-descended North Americans, whose Welshness is recognized not as “a given,” but instead as something they have had to build through personal experience. It should be noted that all identities are built through personal experience; however, in Northwest Wales, Welshness is often more obvious or taken for granted than it is among descendants of immigrants over many generations—after all, the Welsh people are Welsh; the North Americans’ ancestors were Welsh.
For instance, when Welsh people discuss what it means to be Welsh, they may be assuming that “Welsh” refers to someone of Welsh parentage, and/or someone born in Wales. The adults in Wales, as shown in this dissertation, further distinguish by adding gradations of Welsh. In North America, it is most likely assumed that a Welsh-American was probably not born in Wales. As such, their parentage is often explicitly stated, which qualifies them to be Welsh—versus “not-Welsh”—and then, degrees of this distinctiveness can be assessed.

However, most notable is the fact that North Americans’ degrees of Welshness are based so heavily on zeal and fervor. In other words, ancestry is not a necessity, since minimal or even no ancestry in one’s parentage may still result in the creation of a cultural identity. Thus, cultural identity-creation is volitional. This is not unlike the Lamarckian model of identity in Oceania, where behavior is at least as important as parentage, and group membership is determined by action instead of ancestry (Linnekin and Poyer 1990: 7-8). Wray et al. use the expression “turfing” an identity, where an individual attains group membership not by building upon ancestral roots, but instead by “laying down” roots through participation in cultural activities (2003). As such, one can build a cultural identity without ancestry.  

It has been argued throughout this dissertation that cultural identity is always the creation of individual cognitive models that are shaped by experience, and thus include the influences of myriad sociohistorical factors. It appears in North America that distance, assimilation, and a lack of salient signs (e.g., language) require that Welsh

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81 Identity based on biological inheritance has been called Mendelian identity, set in opposition to the Lamarckian model (Linnekin and Poyer 1990). However, the Mendelian model of identity over-simplifies cognitive models of cultural identity: while it is true that ancestry is often a part of identity, it is not necessarily the central marker, nor is its presence even necessary.
identity be consciously created with perhaps an almost hyper-awareness. This is in line with the North American responses concerning what makes one Welsh—personal convictions.

Concerning songs as signs of Welshness, the North Americans chose many of the aforementioned “highly coded” nationalistic songs (such as the national anthem and “Yma O Hyd”), songs whose lyrics are more direct in their connections to Welshness through lyrical meaning and context; these were most often chosen by Youth singers in Wales. It is interesting to note, however, that nationalistic songs were still second to religious songs in North America. This may reflect the general religiosity of North Americans as compared to the Welsh, but it most likely also reflects the historical associations of religion—and hymn singing—with Welshness in North America. These results are perfectly in line with the fact that at present, the only Welsh musical activity to survive in large numbers in North America is the gymanfa ganu, while eisteddfodau and choirs have nearly vanished.

Finally, in addition to the difference in sample size, one other contrast in the data sets from Wales and North America is the abundance of people without a personal Welsh identity who took part in the North American research. While there are a few English people who participated in the research in Wales, almost all of the singers are Welsh. In North America, there are singers who have a very strong Welsh identity with varying amounts of ancestry—including none at all, but also many singers with no Welsh identity at all (of Scottish and Irish ancestry, for instance) who sing in their choir for their love of

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82 One North American interviewee suggests why he feels that hymns best represent Welshness: “Although I am no longer religious myself (I doubt that I ever was), to me nothing connotes “Welshness” more than the Non-Conformist small communities of people who grew out of the Industrial Revolution and who struggled to maintain their cultural identity.” Nineteenth-century Nonconformity is firmly linked to Welshness in both Wales and North America today.
singing and for friendship, and even for maintaining Welsh traditions. For some, the latter is important even though otherwise they have no connection to Wales and/or Welshness.

To account for this, I conducted a second analysis of the data, excluding all participants who did not explicitly describe themselves as Welsh in some way. The results were similar to the totals from the previous analysis shown above. For instance, the song choices among this smaller group still reveal religious songs as the most representative of Welshness, followed by nationalistic, then love songs. This self-defined Welsh-identifying group also sees Welshness and musicality as being intertwined; their reasons for thinking this focused mostly on singing, similar to results presented earlier on the whole group of participants.

Similarly, views on degrees of Welshness show that these singers overwhelmingly see some people as more Welsh than others: nine “yes” compared with only two “no” expressed Welshness-by-degree. Furthermore, “personal convictions” outweigh all other reasons for “increased” Welshness. In fact, among this smaller sample, the results were even more robust: there were five choices for personal convictions, two for language, and only one each for geography, ancestry, and music. This emphasis on individual effort, minimal in Wales but abundant in North America, may be interpreted as a way of asserting Welshness amidst assimilation. In the absence of language abilities, being in Wales, having much access to Welsh musical traditions, and having exclusively (or any) Welsh ancestry, the North Americans’ interest in and passion for Welshness becomes vital to their identity.

83 The exception is a couple of Glanaethwy singers, who also alluded to personal effort in Welshness, although they were explaining why people are not more Welsh than others. One explained “it’s what you believe in more than anything else” and another said “most Welsh people are proud to be Welsh.”
In sum, research for this chapter shows that ancestry can be used as a central marker of identity, but it is not a necessary factor in cultural identity. This chapter also reveals notable similarities between data collected in Wales and data collected in Northwest Wales. For example, the North American singers mostly see Welshness in degrees, which is in line with how Welsh adults perceive Welshness. This suggests that gradations of Welshness are age-related—the teens in this research do not recognize such distinctions. The North Americans even use some of the same markers used by singers in Northwest Wales, including language, geography, and music. Even more notable is the North Americans’ choice of personal convictions—passion, conscious effort, commitment—as the most central markers of Welshness. Finally, the North Americans mirror their Welsh counterparts in this dissertation with their perception of Welshness-as-musicality; singing in particular is associated with Welshness on both sides of the Atlantic.

The North Americans’ reasons for being in a choir also feature a social aspect; however, just as common is their desire to preserve Welsh traditions, here again is possibly an example of their desire for more blatant performances of Welshness. Furthermore, “love of singing” was chosen more than either of these other two functions. This probably reflects the more limited opportunities for North Americans to sing in a choir as compared with the Welsh. Singing is part of childhood in Wales as required by school curricula, and there are plenty of choirs to join as adults. For the North

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84 While conversations with Welsh singers in Northwest Wales revealed that some singers were also concerned about preserving Welsh traditions, most did not cite this as a reason for being in choir.

85 Singing is part of Welsh schools’ curricula (see Llywodraeth Cymru/Welsh Government, “Music in the National Curriculum in Wales,” http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/curriculuminwales/arevisedcurriculumforwales/nationalcurriculum1/musicincurrenticulum/?lang=en (accessed 5 December 2011); there is even a new
Americans, the other benefits of being in a Welsh-focused choir come second overall to the singing opportunities that such choirs provide.

The North Americans and the Northwest Welsh differ greatly in their choices of songs as signs of Welshness. Religious songs most often represent Welshness in the North American data, reflecting historical associations between Welshness and religiosity here. While the Welsh MVC singers’ experiences include associating Welshness with nineteenth-century love songs, the North Americans’ experiences have primarily been bound with the gymanfa ganu tradition. As such, the “most Welsh” songs to them are hymns.

The two groups also differ in their reasons for choosing the songs they did. The North Americans chose personal memories over language as a reason why a song represents Welshness. This is not surprising given that they have been relatively outside the language struggles of the past century, and for most, it is not a language they speak. As such, it is not such a primary sign of their own Welshness. As with the singers in Wales, the North American Welsh singers’ perceptions of Welshness reflect their own personal experiences, as well as noted sociohistorical factors.

government initiative (“Cân Sing,” 2009) to promote continued interest in singing as students transition from primary to secondary school (http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2009/091015sing/?lang=en, accessed 5 December 2011). Notably, both English- and Welsh-language schools hold eisteddfodau, in which young students are required to participate (see “Eisteddfodau Resurgent in Our Schools” 2 March 2007, http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/tm_headline=st-david-s-day-heralds-resurgence-of--eisteddfodau-in-our-schools&method=full&objectid=18695793&siteid=50082-name_page.html, accessed 5 December 2011; I often heard people speaking about school eisteddfodau during my year in Wales; however, I cannot say that every school has such requirements). The ubiquity of singing for youth in Wales is reflected in sentiments from interviews in Northwest Wales (as one interviewee noted: “You’re exposed to it whether you want to be or not!”).
CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

**Welsh Cultural Identity in Wales and North America**

There are two characteristics of music that make it ideal for use in cultural identities. First, music’s meaning is largely autobiographical. Various elements of music—volume, tempo, pitch—give it the ability to affect an individual’s emotions, but beyond this, musical meaningfulness is primarily associative and reliant on individual, episodic memory (Menon and Levitin 2005: 181, Ian Cross 1999, 2008). This makes the power of music not only great, but highly personal. Secondly, music enhances affiliations (cf. Ian Cross 2008, 2012). Shared music or music-making strengthens social bonds and can clearly be used as a marker in creating boundaries. Thus, music provides a kind of interface for individual, social, and universal experiences of cultural identity.

Data collected for this dissertation support these two qualities of music’s role in cultural identity. For example, 71% of the singers in this study chose themselves as the performer of the song they feel best represents Welshness, supporting the autobiographical nature of the identity-creation process.\(^1\) Similarly, the sense of community resulting from group music-making is alluded to by the fact that 80% of the singers in this research cited friendship as the function of their choir membership.

\(^1\) Because music’s power is so regulated by experience, performing—as opposing to just hearing—music may add to its power as a marker of identity. Chapin et al. 2010 found that amateur musicians demonstrated enhanced neural responses related to emotion and reward/pleasure in response to music as compared with inexperienced listeners. They note that either musical involvement increases music’s affective power, or that an enhanced reaction to music causes one to become involved in music (e.g., become a musician). Either way, those who take part in music themselves are more sensitive and more stirred emotionally on a physiological level.
Welshness is a cognitive model, emerging from personal experiences. As such, an individual’s Welshness emerges from various signs that have been bundled together, and the connections between these signs have been strengthened through repeated associations. This dissertation shows that particular musics and musical activities are central to Welshness in both Northwest Wales and in North America. The details of these signs—both musical and non-musical—are summarized below.

**Signs of Welshness**

This research shows how important the Welsh language is as a sign of individuals’ cultural identities in Northwest Wales. Even in North America, where most Welsh-identity holders have little or no experience with the language, the language takes on a ceremonial use; stock phrases and songs at annual festivals and other occasions serve to evoke feelings of Welshness. Coupland et al. suggest that this “is potentially a means of engaging (with) the language as a form of cultural display, a means of having Welsh in the social infrastructure, occupying spaces in the sociolinguistic landscape, but without the need for high levels of productive competence or indeed use in the conventional sense” (2006: 371).

This phenomenon may be common—but not necessarily uniform—across all Blank-American identities. For example, the Italian-American community cited earlier in this dissertation has relatively few domains for language use, even within its annual

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2 It may be that Welshness is a conglomeration of overlapping models as opposed to just one, but this is beyond the scope of this research.

3 It must be reiterated that this dissertation focuses specifically on native Welsh-speaking singers in Northwest Wales. Four-fifths of the population of Wales does not speak Welsh: their Welshness is outside the scope of this research. However, there is evidence that even those with minimal or no competence in the Welsh language nevertheless value it as a sign of Welshness (see Coupland et al. 2006).
festival, when compared with the Welsh North Americans at the North American Festival of Wales (NAFOW). The Italian-Americans have the traditional game *morra*, in which Italian numbers are heard. This event is a recent reintroduction played by men at the start of the festival. There are also readings, a sermon, and one song in Italian during the mass that accompanies the festival. Although this use of the Italian language has the same function as stated by Coupland et al. above, by and large, its importance is minimal, since most participants do not use it. Only the priest and the lector speak the language at the mass, a few people sing along to the song, and the only other people using the language are the men taking part in the morra tournament—and they speak only numbers. Moreover, ethnographic fieldwork revealed that few participants have any Italian language proficiency, and those who do learned only very little in high school or from family and/or popular media. In other words, few if any in this community pursue Italian language studies in the present.

The Welsh North Americans, on the other hand, clearly see language use as an important part of their Welshness (cf. Coupland et al. 2006). Hundreds of participants sing in Welsh at the NAFOW’s gymanfa ganu. Beginners’ Welsh language classes are also part of this festival. Conversely, data collected from Italian-American participants show that the mass and the morra tournament—the only domains for Italian language during the festival—are not considered the most important aspects of the event.

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4 The data set in this discussion comprises only these two small and specific populations—participants in a previous study (Johnstone 2011 and Johnstone in submission) and those North Americans in the current dissertation. However, the two festivals can be compared to show differences in the importance of language between the two groups. Each of these festivals serves as a large, important, annual domain for cultural signs for its respective group.

5 Many Welsh North Americans also attend occasional Welsh language classes outside of the festival. Conversely, studying the Italian language is not part of the experiences of the Italian-American participants discussed here.
However, for the Welsh North Americans at the NAFOW, the gymanfa ganu remains the center of their festival. Furthermore, cymanfoedd canu are the most salient Welsh activities overall in North America, and they *feature* the Welsh language.

It can be surmised, then, that language’s significance as a cultural sign varies among groups. Since cultural identity emerges from signs that are dependent on individual and shared experiences, it follows that language is not necessarily the most salient or central sign for all human beings. However, the Welsh language *is* important to Welshness on both sides of the Atlantic.

In addition to the Welsh language, both geography and ancestry are also signs of Welshness in the current research. However, having abundant Welsh ancestry and extensive experience in Wales are not necessary for making an individual “really” Welsh, as demonstrated by the North American data. Notably, this dissertation shows how ancestry can be scant, or even absent altogether, and an individual can still have a real and strong emergent Welshness (cf. Linnekin and Poyer 1990, Wray et al. 2003).

This research shows that North Americans share the most salient signs of Welshness with the adults in Northwest Wales: language and musicality. However, what I have glossed as “personal convictions”—passion for, interest in, and attitude toward Welsh signs—outweigh the other markers in the North American data. It is notable that geography is cited as often as language as a marker of Welshness-by-degree among the North Americans. However, I would argue that like the language, geography in this case is being evoked in a ceremonial sense. Being in Wales and being from Wales makes one more Welsh; yet these are outside of most North Americans’ normal, everyday experiences. Thus, like the language, connection to Wales itself is part of the North
Americans’ Welshness, but this connection exists without any regularity of being in Wales. Most have visited Wales, but they do not live there, nor do they originate from there, just as most study some Welsh—or at least, sing it at special occasions—but they do not use it in regular communication.

MVC singers in Northwest Wales view geography as one factor that determines a more robust Welshness. For many of these men, their own corner of Wales is “more Welsh” than other areas. It may be that upon seeing what they perceive as the death—or at least the diminishing—of the MVC, which is an important sign for them, the men focus on other signs of Welshness. Their convictions that the MVC is in decline may be causing them to emphasize their distinctiveness, which is a common reaction when one perceives a threat to his/her cultural identity. One way to emphasize their distinctiveness is to focus on the historical competition for Welshness between North and South Wales.

Although often cited as a marker of the degree of Welshness by MVC singers in Wales, geography was actually cited less than signs such as language, poetry, and choral singing among this group. Geography is even less frequent among the responses of the adult female singers in Wales, who most often chose musicality as both the measure of more-or-less Welshness, and of Welshness overall.

Geography was not found to be a significant sign among the Youth singers in Wales. These teens are young and fairly isolated in a region full of Welsh-speakers and choirs, so their geographic place is probably taken for granted. At the very least, they may not perceive Welshness as something that is being threatened and in need of defending, and therefore, they would not need to emphasize their space as one that is distinctively Welsh. Furthermore, the teenage singers made it clear that they do not see
Welshness in degrees; as such, there can be no place that is “particularly” Welsh.

Similarly, in another study of Welsh children by Scourfield et al. (2006), they found no evidence of defensiveness about the children’s home locality and its identity. Scourfield et al. write: “Above all, there is little elaborated sense of ‘anywhere else’ at all, and this, in its turn, rather undermines the possibility of a strong sense of ‘here’…” (Scourfield et al., 2006: 591).6

However, the children in Scourfield et al. did demonstrate a tendency to prioritize birthplace—their own and their parents’—but otherwise, they expressed little in the way of distinctive markers of Welshness (2006: 586). The teens in the current research were also notably specific about their birthplace,7 and they had far fewer signs of Welshness overall as compared to the adults. Of the few they mentioned, musicality—specifically, singing traditional choral repertoire—was the most common.

The Blank-American perceptions of Welshness presented in this dissertation are based less on any of the signs discussed here than they are on an individual’s personal convictions. Thus, as predicted, North American Welshness is not necessarily reliant on ancestry, but instead emerges out of genuine interest and effort in using the signs of Welsh culture. It is the passion for these signs—not necessarily the proficient, regular use of them—that defines the strength of one’s Welshness.8

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6 Scourfield et al. also found that language was a prominent marker for the children in their experiment, and suggested that this obvious sign might be so salient for them because they have less experience with other signs than older people would have (2006: 585, 589, 592).

7 When asked to fill in “birthplace,” nearly all specifically answered “Bangor,” “Bangor, Gwynedd,” or “Bangor, Gwynedd, North Wales.” Only two just wrote “Wales.” It should be noted that some adults were also this specific (listing a city name), and most adults wrote “North Wales” rather than just “Wales.”

8 Cf. Wray et al. 2003, who show that an initial sense of belonging to a culture is not necessary for valuing cultural signs or representations of that culture. Instead, it may be that through practicing cultural activities (e.g., singing in a Welsh-focused choir), individuals achieve a sense of affiliation (cf. Linnekin
North American Welshness, despite geographic distance from Wales and sometimes little or no ancestral connections in otherwise “very” Welsh people, most likely stems from assimilation in the US and Canada. Specifically, one can still be as Welsh as can be with little or no ancestry, since passion for Welshness is the central determining factor here. However, it is notable that the North Americans view Welshness in degrees: this is like the Welsh adults, but unlike the Welsh teens. These results suggest that age may be important for building a more complex, less “either/or” perception of Welshness. Furthermore, the North Americans’ exclusive Welshness may be due in part to their identities including many “detrimental” factors, such as mixed ancestry, and not being in or from Wales. As such, Welsh identity requires more effort, and in turn, some people achieve this better than others.

Perhaps the most notable finding among the interview results is the centrality of musicality—in particular, choral singing—among all age groups, in both sexes, and on both sides of the Atlantic. In Wales, popular media’s continued portrayals of Welsh people as choral singers enhance historical connections between Welshness and choral singing. In North America, the gymanfa ganu tradition’s role as the sole domain for Welshness in the twentieth century means that Welshness continues to be reinterpreted as an identity built primarily on religious choral singing.

and Poyer 1990). The signs noted by the North Americans include those also used by singers in Northwest Wales. While musicality was not used specifically to measure degrees of Welshness by the North Americans, it was cited as a distinctively Welsh trait.

9 One notable caveat is the lack of teenage Welsh-Americans in this research. My fieldwork experiences yielded only adult Welsh identity-creators. As such, it may be that Welsh North American teens differ from Welsh teens in their perceptions. However, since I have yet to find younger participants in Welsh cultural activities, such information is unavailable. Hopefully, future research might reveal younger Welsh North Americans’ views.
**Songs as Signs of Welshness**

The purpose of the surveys in this research was to try and isolate specific songs that are part of the musicality discussed above. Beyond this, they also aimed to illuminate what *in* a song makes it a powerful representation of cultural identity. To complement the qualitative data obtained in the surveys, two statistical tests were used to further investigate patterns in participants’ responses. Relationships between the chosen songs, reasons for choosing those songs, and various social factors—including age, sex, birthplace, and language abilities—were examined.

One test, Kendall’s tau, showed several significant correlations. First, it showed that teenagers were significantly less likely than other age groups to choose themselves as the performer of a song that represents Welshness. This is notable given that most of the singers (71%) who cited a performer chose themselves: these were almost exclusively adults. Thus, the correlation supported the argument that personal experience is an important element in the choosing of cultural signs, and the teens’ more limited experience is reflected in the absence of this phenomenon among their data. Secondly, Kendall’s tau revealed that both lyrical content and Welsh language lyrics—as what makes a song most representative of Welshness—reliably co-occurred with nationalistic and religious songs. One interpretation of this is that religious and nationalistic songs are meaningful specifically because of their message, and it may be that the Welsh language as a medium for this message makes the latter more powerful.

Love songs, on the other hand, probably represent Welshness through associations based on other factors. Most likely, the adults chose these since they have sung these songs in Welsh choirs for many years and consider them to be “traditional” Welsh music.
Notably, the few teens who entertained the idea of some people being more Welsh than others all suggested that choirs (e.g., MVCs) who sing traditional repertoire might be the “most Welsh” types of choir. Yet in choosing songs that best represented Welshness, the teens did not choose the nineteenth-century love songs so abundant in MVC repertoire, songs that the MVCs themselves chose as their own song signs. Instead, the teens chose nationalistic songs like the national anthem and Dafydd Iwan’s “Ymo O Hyd.” These songs explicitly describe a need for protecting the Welsh language. The “obviousness” of these choices might reflect less-developed cognitive models, which would be the result of fewer years of making associations between songs and feeling Welsh.

Overall, lyrical content and language were the top two reasons why a song best represents Welshness across all groups. This supports the argument that lyrical meaning offers a strong, guided meaningfulness to songs, and that the Welsh language is a salient sign of Welshness among singers of all ages in Northwest Wales. However, the oldest singers had the most varied reasons why songs represent Welshness. This can be explained by their presumably richer, more varied cognitive models.

In addition to the correlational analyses discussed above, the ANOVA analysis indicated that people of different ages reliably chose different song types. In other words, it also confirms that the song categories used in this dissertation (e.g., nationalistic, religious) are adequate labels for analyzing differences in song-sign choices. Lyrical content was chosen more than language in all groups except the singers ages 60 and older. The fact that the language may be more notable as a reason why a song represents Welshness among the oldest singers may be interpreted as a product of the different age groups’ temporal and geographic places. The oldest singers most likely have had the most experience with non-Welsh people, and they have rallied around the language in defending their culture the longest. As such, they may be hyper-aware of a need to stress the medium of the lyrics; in other words, they had to note the use of the Welsh language. The youngest singers, on the other hand, have always been surrounded by Welsh speakers and the language’s prominent role in media and government affairs. Thus, lyrical meaning—specifically about the language struggle—would be viewed as the best indicator of Welshness within a song, while the fact that these lyrics are in Welsh might be taken for granted. However, it should be noted that the language of the lyrics was the second most-chosen reason why a song represents Welshness overall, so Welsh language and Welshness are clearly and firmly connected for all age groups.

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there was a significant difference in song type choices for people of different ages. Song types with both religious and love elements increased with the age of the participants, and the teenagers unanimously chose nationalistic songs.\textsuperscript{11} It is notable then that the qualitative data show the adults subscribing to a more exclusive Welshness—some people are more Welsh than others, while the teens’ Welshness seems to be comparatively inclusive—no one can be more Welsh than another. However, the latter group sees songs about the language struggle as most representative of Welshness. This exclusive, defensive type of song appears to be at odds with the teens’ explanations of why one person cannot be more Welsh than another, in which they clearly stated that Welsh language abilities do not determine Welshness.

These results are consistent with the findings of Scourfield and Davies (2005), despite the difference in ages of the participants: in their study, the children were ages 8 to 11; the young participants in this research were ages 14 to 18. Scourfield and Davies examined Welsh children’s views of race and Welshness (Wales has an extremely small minority population; the country was 97.9\% white in the 2001 census, 2005: 86). Their research showed that Welsh children’s concepts of Welshness were inclusive, with statements like “we’re all the same on the inside,” but they framed their inclusiveness with “traditional and exclusive discourse” (Scourfield and Davies 2005: 103). In other words, the children used traditional, even stereotypical, signs of Welshness in their descriptions of identity. For example, when describing a black child in Wales, the

\textsuperscript{11} Although 7\% of these choices were songs that are both nationalistic and religious, there was not a single non-nationalistic song chosen among the teens’ data. This choice of exclusively nationalistic songs was unique to the youngest group of participants; all other age groups also chose both religious and love songs.
children viewed him as Welsh as any other, if he played rugby, spoke Welsh, or had a Welsh-sounding name (2005: 103).

Like the children in Scourfield and Davies (2005), the teens in this dissertation chose traditional and exclusive songs of Welshness, despite otherwise seeing Welshness as rather inclusive. One possible interpretation is that the teen singers in this dissertation chose nationalistic songs due to the fact that they have much less experience with Welshness than the adults do. As such, they have less experience making associations between songs and Welshness. Moreover, they typically do not sing nineteenth-century love songs in their more modern version of choir. Therefore, they would not perceive such songs as being central to their own Welshness.

The teens mostly chose the national anthem. Because of this song’s function as the national anthem, it carries a more agreed-upon meaning than most other songs. Beyond this, its lyrics emphasize Welsh nationalism and the language struggle in particular. The other most-often chosen song among the teens was Dafydd Iwan’s “Yma O Hyd,” which also recounts the struggles to save the Welsh language from Anglicization. For the whole of the teenagers’ lives, discussions of Welshness have always occurred in conjunction with language loss and maintenance. Continued language-based protests, legislation, and the growth of Welsh language media all contribute to these associations. It follows that the teens would think of such songs as the best signs of Welshness, especially considering that they have not spent a lifetime reflecting on what it means to be Welsh like the oldest singers may have done.

In sum, this dissertation shows that musicality encompasses not just songs, but musical activities as well—specifically choral singing. This is a central sign of
Welshness in both Northwest Wales and in North America. Indeed, along with the Welsh language, it the most salient sign of Welshness stated in the present research. North Americans view Welsh people as especially musical. Northwest Welsh singers view *themselves* as musical, often in comparison to the English. Consider this quoted passage from a singer/conductor in Northwest Wales:

> We shall have to make sure you come to a gymanfa ganu, because what it is, obviously, hymn singing and singing anthems by the whole congregation…this tradition doesn’t exist at all in England, where they have Anglican churches and the choir sings the four-part harmony, etc. We have a tradition in Wales as you know where the congregation sings in four parts, even though it’s dwindling unfortunately.

This description of the gymanfa ganu in particular implies a sense of high-quality amateurism that seems to have always been part of the Welsh choral institution: notice the emphasis on the fact that it is not just the choir who sings in harmony (like the English), it is *the whole congregation* who sings in harmony at a gymanfa. This suggests a musicality that is distinctive—or at least, widespread—among the Welsh.

However, Welshness-as-musicality does not seem to manifest itself as derision, or a sense of Welsh people necessarily being *better* singers than the English or anyone else. Instead, most participants seemed to stress the abundance of choral *opportunities* as something that is unique to Wales. Rather than an in-born ability for something wholly unique, choral singing is viewed as something widely valued and celebrated in Welsh culture, and thus, it is distinctively Welsh. In other words, Welshness-as-musicality might be described as a recognition and appreciation of the rich array of Welsh choral
activities, including cymanfoedd canu, eisteddfodau, choirs, and more. Many of these activities took shape in the nineteenth century and are still being reinterpreted today. Therefore, many Welsh people see their culture as being distinctively delineated by singing, not necessarily because of superior vocal abilities, and not because they have a unique form or sound of choir, but instead because choral activities or contexts are uniquely theirs, and because singing is so ubiquitous among Welsh people. These connections are enhanced by the media, so Wales’ “Land of Song” designation continues to be reinterpreted to the present day.

**Welshness Reinterpreted**

Since cultural identity emerges from experience, it is not surprising that choral singers would view choral singing as being associated with Welshness. Welshness, bound up as it is with choral singing, is what has been labeled “Welsh choral identity” in this dissertation. Like all identities, it is fluid, individual, and contextual. However, specific sociohistorical patterns contribute to reinterpretation of these identities.

First, it is notable that the repertoire categorized as “love songs” in this dissertation (e.g., “Myfanwy”) is what the women and teens called the “traditional” songs of the MVCs. Many of these songs were written and/or made popular in the late nineteenth century. In addition to “Myfanwy,” others include religious songs like “Calon Lân” and “Ar Hyd y Nos,” and nationalistic songs such as “Y Ddau Wladgarwr” and “Hen Wlad fy Nhadau”—the latter is the national anthem of Wales. 12 These developed

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12 I labeled songs like “Myfanwy” “love songs” because I analyzed them for lyrical content. There are other examples of love songs in this repertoire (e.g., “Lisa Lân”), but there are also religious and nationalistic songs. Information about these songs (including composers, dates, etc.) is available through the following sources: BBC, “Joseph Parry,”
in the nineteenth century along with traditional clothing, the popularization and standardization of eisteddfodau, cymanfoedd canu, and the concept of Wales as “the Land of Song.” Today, it is the Male Voice Choir that is most closely associated with a sense of “traditional” musical culture in Wales, despite the fact that all choir types existed from the nineteenth century through the present day.

It should be emphasized that the choral institution and its emergent identity were aided by the standardization and popularity of the National Eisteddfod in the late nineteenth century, as well as by local eisteddfodau in both Wales and in North America. In Wales, the eisteddfod tradition continues to support connections between Welshness, the Welsh language, and choral identity to the present. Linda Pohly’s research (1989) shows that eisteddfodau were extremely popular in North America during the nineteenth century, and this popularity undoubtedly contributed to the abundance of choirs here during that time.

However, Welsh migration to the US dwindled after 1900, and the language and other signs (e.g., eisteddfodau, choirs) experienced an accelerated decline in the 1930s and 1940s (Garrett et al. 2005: 533-4). It was during this time (1929) that the “National” gymanfa ganu was created, giving Americans and Canadians one of their few remaining
domains of Welshness. As such, Welshness in North America has been reinterpreted as an identity largely based on hymn singing.

Moreover, hymn singing and the gymanfa ganu hearkens back to the immigrants, who came during a period of religious revival. However, the immigrants themselves were more interested in eisteddfodau, and Welsh people today are not focused en masse on cymanfoedd canu. Welsh North Americans, on the other hand, choose this sign as a particularly powerful signifier of Welshness. Data on song choices show that religious songs in particular are central to North American Welshness.

This concept of Welshness—a Welshness-as-musicality, specifically focused on hymns—serves to give North Americans a sense of continuity and connection to their ancestors. They create Welshness based less on Wales and Welshness in Wales today than on Welshness created through the nationalization and standardization of the gymanfa ganu in North America.

This provides just one of many examples of the reinterpretation of an otherwise “antiquated” sign of Welshness. Women’s traditional clothing, an invention of the nineteenth century based on former working class clothes, is another: these images adorn souvenirs both in Wales and at North American Welsh events (e.g., the North American Festival of Wales, which always features a room set up with sellers of Welsh souvenirs, books, etc.). Garrett et al. found that newspaper images in Y Drych beginning in the 1970s changed from focusing on Welsh institutions in North America to those showing Wales as a “rural, timeless and traditional place” (2005: 545, 557). Bishop et al. 2003

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13 Juliette Wood found that American students were more familiar with Celtic imagery on Welsh souvenirs than they were with the nineteenth-century imagery that was most familiar to the Welsh students (1997: 99). This supports Bishop et al.’s arguments that perceptions of Welshness reflect individuals’ own personal experiences, and in the case of the Americans, their common disconnectedness from contemporary Wales (2003: 54).
also found that North American conceptions of Wales and Welshness are based on old, idyllic views of Wales and Welsh culture. In the present research, participants speaking of bara brith (a type of Welsh bread) or coal mining as signs of Welshness are in line with these arguments.\(^{14}\)

Welshness continues to be reinterpreted in North America, particularly since the 1970s, when there was an explosion of interest in Welsh culture. For example, the Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu Association expanded, the only Welsh North American newspaper outside of *Y Drych* at the time, *Ninnau*, was founded, and Cymdeithas Madog held the first of its annual Welsh-language courses (Garrett et al. 2005: 561-2). Since that time, North Americans have been adding other signs to their Welsh cultural practices, including those developed through the programs at Rio Grande University and Green Mountain College. They have also created new choirs and eisteddfodau, including an eisteddfod at the North American Festival of Wales. As such, it may be that Welshness-as-religious-musicality might be changing in North America.

Of course, notable reinterpretation is not limited to the Welsh diaspora; Welshness also continues to change in Wales—as it does everywhere. For example,

\(^{14}\) Bishop et al. (2003) also suggest that present-day Welshness in North America is constructed with what might be considered outdated signs in Wales. This research is consistent with Welsh signs prevalent at the North American Festival of Wales. In a small survey of fifteen participants, conducted at the 2011 festival, I found people mentioning mining, “comforting scenery,” and bara brith as signs of Welshness. The latter is a type of traditional bread; consider the following description by North Wales Tourism’s former website: “This is literally translated as ‘speckled bread’. Once a week, the stove was lit for baking day, as the heat began to fade in the stove, so a handful of currants was added to the last of the bread dough and this speckled bread became a treat. The flavour, however, of this spiced, honey-glazed fruit bread is delicious when spread with salted Welsh butter, and it is no wonder that Bara Brith is still produced all over Wales.” [http://www.nwt.co.uk/english/eatingout/eatingout_bbrith.htm](http://www.nwt.co.uk/english/eatingout/eatingout_bbrith.htm) (accessed 31 January 2012). The new version of their website lists places to eat, but not descriptions of “traditional recipes” as the old one did [http://www.nwt.co.uk/search.php?mode=eatsandtreats](http://www.nwt.co.uk/search.php?mode=eatsandtreats). Although my own experience of Wales was limited, it is notable that I never saw or heard of bara brith while I was in the country, even though I made a concerted effort to eat at local places and seek out “traditional” Welsh foods. See the final section of this chapter for more details about this set of fifteen surveys, which were conducted as preliminary future research.
choral singing in Wales has most recently been appropriating popular music
characteristics—popular repertoire, choreography, and a generally glamorous image. The
role of the media in these changes cannot be overstated. Welsh media—and Welsh-
language media in particular—provide abundant coverage of Welsh musical events.
These events include eisteddfodau and cymanfoed canu as well as newer choir
competitions. The recent abundance of televised choreographed choral performance has
been imitated by various choirs, including some MVCs.

Some praise these changes, suggesting that choral versatility encourages
continued interest among young singers. In fact, most participants in this research view
the current reinterpretation of the choral institution as a sign of the strength of Welsh
choral singing. The MVC singers, however, were sometimes skeptical or suspicious of
these changes in the institution. MVCs have historically been the most famous of the
Welsh choirs, and they have recently undergone changes in form and function: they have
shifted from working men’s competitive choirs to retired men’s social choirs. As such,
these singers most likely interpret the reinterpretation of their choir type as a detriment.
They may be worried about being supplanted by all the new, flashy versions of Welsh
choir.

While MVCs’ elderly membership may signal the decline of the tradition in
Wales, it is also possible that this new version of MVC will continue to be reinterpreted,
since it fills various personal and social needs. Put simply, there will always be new
generations of elderly Welsh men. If singing in an MVC continues to provide a domain
for fulfilling social interaction, the MVCs will live in, albeit in an aged form. This
prediction is supported by the current research, which shows that MVCs continue to be
founded in Northwest Wales; in fact, there has been a large resurgence of them over the past forty to forty-five years. They remain the most famous of the Welsh choir types, and the most abundant choir type in Wales. They still sing traditional songs, although they continue to add popular, especially theater, repertoire. Therefore, this dissertation maintains that the reinterpretation discussed here might be aiding the MVCs’ survival, by making them relevant to the present social context of Wales, and by providing older men with camaraderie. Furthermore, given the centrality of choral singing in Welshness, MVCs provide not only friendship, but also meaningful cultural participation.

In sum, the two most salient signs of Welshness in both Northwest Wales and in North America are language and musicality. In Wales, the high profile of the struggle to save the Welsh language continues to strengthen connections between Welshness and the language,15 while the standardization of the National Eisteddfod in Wales and its continued popularity have undoubtedly contributed to Welshness-as-musicality. Beyond this, modern media coverage of musical activities enhances this association. In North America, minimal Welsh-language competence does not diminish the language’s role as an important sign of Welshness. Participants at the North American Festival of Wales learn a few phrases in language classes and enjoy songs and recitations that they may not comprehend, and they derive a sense of fulfilling Welshness in doing so.16 One

15 The twentieth century’s language struggles have already been discussed in this dissertation. However, one cannot stress enough the importance of the National Eisteddfod’s “all-Welsh” rule since the 1950s, increasing nationalism during the latter part of the century (much of it centered on the language), the creation of Welsh-language media and its accompanying industry in Wales, and continued language legislation through the present. These all contribute to making the language a salient sign of Welshness, and serve to further strengthen associations between language and music through several means, including the National Eisteddfod being conducted entirely in Welsh, and televised music events being broadcast in Welsh.

16 I witnessed this firsthand at the festivals in 2009 and 2011. Two examples were a performance of a nationalistic joke (first presented in Welsh, then translated into English) and a dramatic recitation (completely in Welsh, untranslated). Additionally, at a rehearsal for the 2011 festival’s gymnafa, the
participant sums up this phenomenon in finishing the statement “Nothing says Welshness to me like…” with “hearing a native-born Welsh speaker speaking Welsh.”

Musicality is also central to North American Welshness, although here it has a particularly religious bent, being tied to cymanfoedd canu and Welsh hymns. However, this may be changing as choirs and eisteddfodau are reintroduced as part of Welsh cultural practices. In Northwest Wales, adults associate nineteenth-century love songs with Welshness. The teens choose “obviously-Welsh” songs like the national anthem, in which lyrics explicitly refer to the language struggle. The latter has been part of the social landscape in Wales for the duration of these teenagers’ lives. Moreover, they have not had as much time as the adults have had to reflect on and build associations between other types of music and their own Welsh identities.

The Significance of This Dissertation and Possible Areas for Future Research

Cultural Identity and Music

One of the central tenets of this dissertation is that musical meaningfulness works on an associative or indexical level. Ian Cross suggests three dimensions for musical meaning (2012: 321-2). The first might be defined—using Turino’s terms—as iconic: changes in tempo, register, and intensity give rise to interpretations based on these characteristics’ resemblance to non-musical phenomena—e.g., increased tempo and volume refer to increased heart rate or higher-pitched voices when excited (cf. Turino

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Welsh conductor suggested that maybe the North Americans should pronounce “Halleluja” in an “American” way, so that it would be easier—the Welsh “Haleliwia” has an added “ee-oo” sound. This was met with an immediate and bold outcry of protests; the North Americans clearly wanted to try to make it sound as Welsh as they could.
1999: 226-7). The second and third may be considered indexical. The second is described as being based on music’s resemblance to other known musics: e.g., call and response, melodic contour. Cross’ third dimension is the one focused on in this research:

A third dimension of musical meaning stems from the ways in which musical activities and their traces come to have particular significances in specific cultural contexts. These significances are the result of active participation in, and engagement with, the dynamics and specificities of particular cultural contexts and processes, as well as of individual life histories. (2012: 322)

Why music is so effective in this regard has become an important area of study, although the data are still rather limited.17 Once again, Ian Cross offers an explanation of music’s semantic power that might also explain why it is so commonly and so effectively used as part of cultural identities. He suggests that while music offers a sense of being meaningful, it retains its indeterminacy. Individuals derive different significances that appear to be intrinsic to the music, but since these differences are not “made manifest,” there is no conflict; on the contrary, the shared experience actually fosters affiliation (2012: 321).

Various anthropological, psychological, and linguistic resources are used in this dissertation to facilitate a scientific discussion of musical meaning. These non-musical disciplines offer insights into how the brain processes music and meaning, and how Welshness is a type of cognitive model, a body of signs that have become associated through experience. It is shown in this dissertation that language is one of the central

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17 See Patel 2008 and Rebuschat, ed. 2012. Many studies focus exclusively on western tonal music, and as such, are limited in what they can reveal about musical perception on a universal level (cf. Ian Cross 2012: 325-6).
signs of Welshness, and as such, it warrants significant discussion. Furthermore, overlap in the cognitive and neural mechanisms of language and music suggests that they share structure and function. This overlap is particularly important in the present research, because the repertoire is primarily music with lyrics.\textsuperscript{18}

Particularly for older singers in Northwest Wales, there is not only a love for the Welsh language, but there has also been a need—historically—to defend this language. This might explain in part why poetry evokes Welshness among this population. I would argue that poetry, being more abstract than other forms of language, may allow for the accessing of a greater range of associations than that afforded by typical written or spoken language. In other words, poetry provides access to cognitive models, but not necessarily to ones that integrate in the usual sense. In poetry, the mind blends concepts, leaving more room for novel interpretation, perhaps from individual experience (cf. Coulson and Oakley 2005, Turner 2006). Poetry also causes one to focus on language in and of itself, which for many Welsh people in Northwest Wales, is associated with feelings of Welshness.

Despite the importance of language and poetry to these participants, music is clearly an important sign of Welshness, not only in Northwest Wales, but in North America too, and among participants of all ages. While most people would probably intuitively say that music has the power to affect emotions, experiments that examine which parts of the brain music is actually affecting offer empirical support. Part of music’s centrality is undoubtedly due to its ability to activate emotional and

\textsuperscript{18} For example, both music and language are sequential units in temporal order and both provide access to meaning. Patel does note that there may be some domain specificity concerning these two systems, but there are shared processing mechanisms for both (2008, 2012).
reward/pleasure centers in the brain (cf. Levitin 2011: 13, Lerner et al. 2009). This may also be why music seems to have the ability to enhance words (cf. Thompson and Russo 2004).

The combination of music and language found in song is complicated because both linguistic and non-linguistic information tap into the conceptual system. The result is a rich tapestry of meaning—some very specific, some shared, some idiosyncratic and highly individual. Language is more tailored to retrieving specific knowledge; music is more abstract. Cross (2012: 325) suggests that music endows lyrics “with a fluidity of meaning by foregrounding the expressive and affiliative dimensions of pitch and rhythm.” If one also considers the emotional activation caused by these musical phenomena, it is clear how one can be stirred by song. Cross notes another crucial aspect of this process when he suggests that “music is typically an integral component of larger contexts for social interaction that may shape and constrain participants’ interpretation of music’s possible meanings” (2012: 325).

Lerner et al. (2009) found that the amygdala, which has an important role in emotional memory (Piore 2012: 42) and in establishing the emotional context of sounds, is more activated by music when the latter is combined with film and also when the participants’ eyes are closed.19 Perhaps the combination of visual cues and music—or in the case of closed eyes, imagined visual cues and music—allows for a richer network of associations.20 This might also explain how a melody, combined with Welsh words and a

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19 Lerner et al. (2009) note that music does not always activate the amygdale. However, in this study they found greater activation with music-plus-film than with either music or film alone. In the second experiment (described above), they found that “closing the eyes while listening to emotional music resulted in enhanced ratings of emotionality” and greater activation in the amygdala.

20 Whatever is jointly attended to during experience forms an associated unit in memory (Pacton and Perruchet, 2008 and Phillip Hamrick, personal communication).
gathering of fellow Welsh or Welsh-associated people, might tap into the emotional
centers in the brain, producing the ineffable feelings of belonging and pride that typically
comprise cultural identity. The songs and activities become imbued with
meaningfulness, which is strengthened through repeated associations.

In other words, associations between music/musical activities and emergent
feelings of cultural identity cause individuals to assign meanings of identity to songs and
music-making. In the present research, this includes meanings of Welshness ascribed to
songs and choral singing/membership. Repeated associations cause the brain to
strengthen the neural connections between these elements. As such, the human brain
wires itself so that these cultural signs access one another. Thus, music and musical
activities contribute to both positive feelings and feelings of distinctive Welshness.

Reflections on the Fieldwork of This Dissertation

The theories about memory, musical meaning, and the creation of cultural identity
presented throughout this dissertation help to elucidate the results of the fieldwork
conducted for this project. As a primarily qualitative endeavor, this work was begun
without many preconceived ideas about what might be found. Previous research on
Blank-American identity prepared me for some of the issues encountered here (e.g.,
identity by degree). However, I have tried to allow the arguments to emerge from the
data. Some quantitative analysis was employed in order to provide insights that are
complementary to the qualitative data.

As with any study of human beings, there are caveats in this research. While
some words—or songs or places or activities—access models of Welshness, the models
are comprised of mostly non-linguistic conceptual knowledge. Feinberg and Genz (2012) note the challenges of understanding non-linguistic knowledge through traditional fieldwork methods, namely asking questions and depending on the spoken answers. Obviously, I cannot wholly understand models of Welshness using questions or the participants’ explanations—especially when so many of their answers seemed to suggest an ineffability of Welshness. Traditional methods of discussion with participants fall short of differentiating between what is in the individual’s mind and his/her articulation of these things. In other words, people’s explanations of what represents Welshness for them might not be accurate, or at least, may not provide the full picture.

One of the other potential problems with fieldwork is the role of the researcher. In this research, I found that male singers in all-male choir rehearsals or performances were eager to talk with me, while my efforts among the female adults and the teens were much less fruitful. In just four evenings, I was able to interview sixteen MVC singers. Conversely, I spent nearly a year attending weekly rehearsals with the Conwy Mixed Choir and was only able to gain the insights of ten women in a group of about forty, and some of these were only on paper and not face-to-face.

Moreover, I noticed that some people’s reception of me and the project changed when I brought my husband with me into a fieldwork situation. Some women in particular were less receptive and even aloof before they found out I was married; I do not wear a ring or other outward symbol of my marital status. There were specific instances when women were more forthcoming after learning that I was not a single woman. As such, I suspect that my ability to collect data would have been different if I was a male, and I believe it would have been somewhat limited if I was a single female in
Wales alone. Fieldwork conducted alone versus fieldwork conducted while my husband was present\textsuperscript{21} led me to suspect that gender played a part in the access I was afforded.

Beyond these gender issues, there was the issue of language, since I do not speak Welsh, even though I conducted much of the fieldwork among native Welsh speakers. It was not necessary for me to learn Welsh, since all participants had native fluency in English, and the short period I was in Wales would not have afforded me the time needed to learn Welsh well enough to conduct fieldwork in it. I did study it that year out of respect and interest. Nevertheless, the fact that I could not understand the participants’ conversations with each other was a detriment to my overall observational abilities.

With the teenagers, I do not think that gender provided a barrier to the research. Instead, a combination of age, language, and origin were bigger factors. The fact that I am a young adult, monolingual English-speaker and an American—and Americans rarely come to this rural part of Wales—probably made some of the teens apprehensive about participating in my fieldwork. Despite Maelgwn, Conwy, and Glanaethwy all conducting rehearsals in Welsh, only the first two had English singers in the choir; the teenage choir was entirely comprised of native Gwynedd County residents and all native Welsh speakers. Furthermore, in the adult choirs’ rehearsals, the conductor would often encourage participation in my research, and he did this in English. For example, one night at a Conwy rehearsal, the conductor remarked: “Jennifer is here again—her attendance is better than many of yours (the choir laughed). Please talk to her and help her out.” Conversely, fieldwork at Ysgol Glanaethwy was conducted among the teens without the presence of the directors, since each week I spoke to the teens before

\textsuperscript{21} As a linguist and fellow researcher, my husband was able to observe and confirm these awkward situations, and recognized his role in my ability to get close to certain people.
rehearsals began. As such, my inquiries initiated the use of English, which otherwise is not part of their rehearsals. Therefore, I feel that I was an anomaly, being an American in Bangor, North Wales. I was also older than the teens, but not as old as their instructors, and a monolingual foreign-language speaker. All of these factors may have affected how much the teens felt like they could relate to me, or at least, how open and honest they could or would be with me. Nevertheless, I feel that despite these few caveats, the data presented here adequately represent the singers’ perceptions of Welshness. Still, future research on these groups can improve on these methods.

**Future Research and Conclusions**

In 2011, I collected fifteen surveys at the North American Festival of Wales. My intention was to determine if music was a salient sign among non-choir members, and I also wanted to gain insight into the Welsh identities of festival participants for possible future research. The surveys provide several notable patterns for further exploration. First, they suggest that Welshness is viewed by degree, both in ancestry and in judging one’s Welshness. The fact that all of these participants were adults makes their responses in line with those of the singers.

In describing their connections to Wales/Welshness, several participants made specific remarks concerning their ancestry, including “my mother was full Welsh,” my mother has “100% Welsh heritage,” and “my father was all Welsh, my mother one-quarter.” Thirteen of fifteen people also said that some people are more Welsh than others. Like the singers, these participants suggested that personal convictions—including “interest in,” “strong love for,” and “attitude”—were central to Welshness. In
addition to personal convictions, language, musicality, and geography were all cited as means for measuring Welshness.

Importantly, the surveys reveal the striking centrality of musicality among North American signs of Welshness. For instance, participants were asked: “What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Wales/Welshness?” Among the highly traditional answers are references to coal mining and also to the geography of Wales; the latter included “hills” and “Wales’ countryside.” There are also references to “friendly, hardworking people” and “hospitality.” However, the most often-cited response was musicality, which was noted ten times; six of these ten were specifically related to singing. The following is a summary of all responses:

Figure 32. North American non-singers’ responses to “What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Wales/Welshness?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Musicality</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal Mining</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, the instructions to finish the statement “Nothing says Welshness to me like…” produced many references to music and musical activities. The other signs listed above are also present, in addition to one visual reference—the Welsh dragon—22—and bara brith, a traditional bread. All answers are listed below:

[^22]: This is the central feature on the Welsh flag.
These results mirror research in linguistics by suggesting a Zipfian distribution: the probability of occurrence of items—in this case, signs of Welshness—begins high and then tapers off (cf. Tullo and Hurford 2003). In other words, there is one very high-frequency exemplar that is also prototypical (Goldberg 2006 in Ellis and Ferreira–Junior 2009: 372). These data suggest that the highest frequency sign and prototype of Welshness is musicality. As such, musicality is central to Welshness, even among non-singers.

Fourteen songs were chosen as signs of Welshness among this group. These mirrored the song types chosen by North American singers: most are religious selections, followed by nationalistic songs. Specifically, eight are hymns, one is both nationalistic and religious, four are nationalistic (the national anthem), and one is a love song. Beyond this, 87% of respondents chose music as their favorite part of the festival. It is clear, at least among this small sample, that musicality is a sign of Welshness even among non-singers. Even though this dissertation focuses specifically on singers and on choral identity, this data set provides a basis for future research on Welsh-American identities.
It also supports the earlier arguments concerning North American Welshness and its reliance on signs that are not necessarily currently relevant in Wales. For example, mining is no longer a staple of Welsh industry. However, it was the industry that employed most of the Welsh immigrants in North America. As such, it is associated with Welshness for some. Bishop et al. suggest that “…distance can be said to implicate time as well as space. Many of the texts construct images of Welsh cultural life and values for Welshness which are highly traditional, viewed from the standpoint of contemporary Wales itself” (2003: 54).

While this research is still in its beginning phases, it continues work on Welsh-American identities begun by researchers from Cardiff University (Bishop et al., 2003, Wray et al. 2003, Garrett et al. 2005, Coupland et al. 2006). Several participants in Garrett et al. suggest that singing is part of their practices that, as the authors put it, “develop and engender feelings of Welshness” (2005: 51). However, as linguists, these Cardiff researchers are not emphasizing musical signs; instead, they are analyzing the discourse of the participants. Thus, one of the crucial gaps being filled by this dissertation is the focus on music. Because music is so central to Welsh identities both in Wales and in North America, such research is necessary to gain clearer insights into Welshness in both places.

In Wales, this research sheds light on the reinterpretation of the choral institution. In North America, it provides insight into Blank-Americanism. Future research could go further to examine prototypes of Welshness in both places; in other words, surveys and

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23 Another possible method might be to offer a participant a variety of signs (nineteenth-century clothing, Welsh songs, the flag, etc.) and ask him/her to rate them beginning with the “most” Welsh. Such typicality ratings would be based on prototype theories, which suggest that humans have representations of “best examples” (prototypes) of categories (Lakoff 1987: 7, see also Eleanor Rosch 1975). Thus,
interviews could more specifically determine which signs are central to people’s identities. A combination of questions, such as “The first thing that comes to mind when I think of Welshness is…” and “Nothing says Welshness to me like…” may work best to uncover the most salient associations or signs.

The North American Festival of Wales provides an annual gathering of Welsh-identity-creators; as such, it remains an ideal location for conducting fieldwork among this group. The fact that most participants at this event are elderly suggests that some of these practices may disappear in the near future. It will be interesting to see if some of these signs of Welshness will be reinterpreted by younger singers and non-singers alike once the old gymanfa-goers are gone. However, the venues for fieldwork in North America could also be expanded to include new choirs, such as We Are the Men, MVC Inc., and new events, such as the West Coast Eisteddfod. The latter (and events like it) might reveal a less religion-focused Welshness than the NAFOW, which still revolves around a gymanfa ganu. In Northwest Wales, follow-up fieldwork could be conducted, revealing reinterpreted Welsh signs as the youth singers grow older.

In closing, this dissertation examines signs of Welshness among a sample of Welsh and North American singers. The central signs are language and musicality. Theories about music and musical activities working primarily as indexes at a personal, autobiographical level (Cross 2008, Turino 1999) are supported by the current research,

Welshness or a Welsh person would be perceived as exhibiting particular traits that would make the identity or the person “really” Welsh or less so, which is in line with participants’ Welshness-by-degree perceptions. As such, methods like these may offer insights into what best represents an individual’s abstract concept of Welshness. Although limited by the nature of language and the inherent problems in articulating ambiguous, abstract concepts, the best fieldwork on these topics would include a combination of these methods.

The new surveys described above (completed by North Americans non-singers) support my qualitative observations concerning the lack of young festival attendees: the average age of the survey participants is 68.
as are theories about the reinterpretation of cultural signs (Herskovits 1948, 1951, Kazadi wa Mukuna 1990). Songs are also shown to be signs of Welshness. Notably, patterns in these data reflect sociohistorical influences, including the effects of age and experience, language legislation, media influence, isolation, and temporal and geographic distance.

Finally, theories of cognitive models and music and meaningfulness are central to understanding an abstraction such as Welshness. Understanding cognition is important for understanding the processing of music, and the feelings and associations it accesses. It is from these bundles of associations that cultural identities emerge, built on personal experiences. When music and musical activities are among the central signs of cognitive models, they become a lens through which one can begin to understand identity, in individual, shared, and universal forms. As such, future research can and should draw upon the methods and data presented here. While this dissertation focuses on only a few populations of Welsh identity-creators, it serves, as Suzel Ana Reily suggests, “to contribute one small piece of the massive global puzzle” (2010: 332) concerning music, meaningfulness, and cultural identity.
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Carroll County Public Schools. “Eisteddfod.”  

Casglu’r Tlysau. The Website for Welsh Heritage and Culture.  


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Directgov. “Devolved Government in the UK.”

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The National Eisteddfod of Wales. “Our History.”


The Welsh Society of Central Ohio.


"Welsh." *Alberta Online Encyclopedia.*

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Discography:


________. *Band of Brothers.* Decca: B002CQV0QI, 2009.


Interviews:


A varying number of singers from the following choirs were interviewed anonymously:
Côr Cymru Goledd America
Côr Cymysg Dyffryn Conwy
Côr Glanaethwy
Côr Ieuencridd Môn
Côr Meibion Maelgwn
Green Mountain College Choir
Toronto Male Voice Choir

Significant personal communications included the following individuals:
James Cassarino, Director of Music, Green Mountain College
Kazadi wa Mukuna, Professor of Ethnomusicology, Kent State University
Phillip Hamrick, Fellow in Psycholinguistics, Georgetown University
Richard Feinberg, Professor of Anthropology, Kent State University
APPENDIX A:
Sample Interview Questions
CONWY MIXED

INTERVIEW

These are the basic questions I have been asking singers. If you’d like to participate, stop by and chat with me, or if you prefer, you can fill in some answers on this sheet (or you can use the back or another page) with as much detail as you can and return it to me. Like the survey, answers will be anonymous! If you want to have your name in my list of “thank yous” appearing at the beginning of the thesis, be sure to print it here or let me know. THANKS!

1.) Briefly describe yourself (age and gender? where you were born? your musical background—chapel? school?, are you a native Welsh-speaker?):

2.) Why did you join your current choir? To you, what is the most important thing about being a member?

3.) Do you think some choirs (or some people) are more Welsh than others? Why or why not? Is it just their language or is it something else?

4.) What is your opinion about the choir tradition in Wales today? (is it fading? growing? are some kinds of choirs more or less popular?) Do you think kids today will join choirs and keep the tradition going?

5.) Compared to other countries, do you think Welsh people are particularly musical? Why or why not?
Glanaethwy

**INTERVIEW**

Although I like to talk to singers face-to-face, you are welcome to answer the questions here instead if you prefer. This should only take about 5 minutes. Fill in as much detail as you can. Like the survey, answers will be anonymous! THANKS!

1.) Briefly describe yourself (age and gender? where you were born? your musical background—chapel? school?, are you a native Welsh-speaker?):

2.) Why did you join your current choir? To you, what is the most important thing about being a member?

3.) Do you think some choirs (or some people) are more Welsh than others? Why or why not? Is it just their language or is it something else?

4.) What is your opinion about the choir tradition in Wales today? (is it fading? growing? are some kinds of choirs more or less popular?)

5.) Do you plan to sing in a choir when you are older? Which type, do you think? (mixed? all male or all female? modern music or traditional or both? etc.)
APPENDIX B:
All Song Surveys
General information (SINGERS):

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!!!

Age: _____ Current choir: ________________________________

Gender (circle one): M    F

Where were you born? ___________________________

How long have you lived in Wales? _________________

Do you speak Welsh? ________. If so, please choose one of the following:

- I learned it as my first language
- I learned English first and started learning Welsh at age: _______

If so, where did you learn?  ______________________________________________

If so, when do you use it today? (circle all that apply)

A.) at home/with family   B.) with friends   C.) at work   D.) at school

Music: Please list songs that best signify “Welshness” to you. Put them in order starting with the best representative of your own personal Welsh identity (They can be any style of music, i.e. pop, traditional, with words, without words, etc.). Then, circle the reason(s) why you chose what you did:

1.) title: ___________________________________________________________________
    by: ______________________________________________________________________
    performed by: ______________________________________________________________________
    why this signifies my Welshness (choose the most important reason(s)—up to 3):

    A) evokes personal memories
    B) what the lyrics are about
    C) the composer/songwriter
    D) the performer(s)
    E) the language of the lyrics
    F) importance to my family
    G) other (briefly explain) ________________________________________________

2.) title: ___________________________________________________________________
    by: ______________________________________________________________________
    performed by: ______________________________________________________________________
    why this signifies my Welshness (choose the most important reason(s)—up to 3):

    A) evokes personal memories
    B) what the lyrics are about
    C) the composer/songwriter
    D) the performer(s)
    E) the language of lyrics
    F) importance to my family
    G) other (briefly explain) ________________________________________________
3.) title: ____________________________________________________________
by: ____________________________________________
performed by: ________________________________
why this signifies my Welshness (choose the most important reason(s)—up to 3):
   A) evokes personal memories
   B) what the lyrics are about
   C) the composer/songwriter
   D) the performer(s)
   E) the language of lyrics
   F) importance to my family
   G) other (briefly explain) ____________________________________________

4.) title: ____________________________________________________________
by: ____________________________________________
performed by: ________________________________
why this signifies my Welshness (choose the most important reason(s)—up to 3):
   A) evokes personal memories
   B) what the lyrics are about
   C) the composer/songwriter
   D) the performer(s)
   E) the language of lyrics
   F) importance to my family
   G) other (briefly explain) ____________________________________________

5.) title: ____________________________________________________________
by: ____________________________________________
performed by: ________________________________
why this signifies my Welshness (choose the most important reason(s)—up to 3):
   A) evokes personal memories
   B) what the lyrics are about
   C) the composer/songwriter
   D) the performer(s)
   E) the language of lyrics
   F) importance to my family
   G) other (briefly explain) ____________________________________________

***Optional: Yes! Please add my name to the “thank you for participating” list of names when this is published (your answers will still remain anonymous!)

(print name: _________________________________________________________)

  Diolch!
General information (SINGERS):

Age: _____
Current choir: __________________________________

Please name any songs that your group sings that make your choir unique:
_____________________________________________________________

Gender (circle one): M F

Where were you born? __________________________________________

How long have you lived in Wales? _____________________________

I describe myself as (Welsh, British, etc.): __________________________

Do you speak Welsh? _________. If so, please choose one of the following:

- I learned it as my first language
- I learned English first and started learning Welsh at age: _______

If you speak Welsh, where did you learn?
___________________________________________

I speak Welsh: (circle all that apply)
*at home/with family   *with friends   *at work   *at school
*with other choir members

Music: The rest of this will take just a couple more minutes. Below, please list songs that best signify “Welshness” to you, personally. Put them in order starting with the one that best represents your own Welsh identity (there is space on page 2 for your second and third choices). Then, circle the reason(s) why you chose what you did: (Choose as many or as few songs as you want and fill in as many details as you can. Your choices can be from any type of music: well-known or little-known, traditional, pop, with words, without words, etc.)

1) title: _________________________________________________
   by: _____________________________________________
   performed by: ______________________________

why this signifies my Welshness—choose the most important reason(s):
   A) evokes personal memories
   B) what the lyrics are about
   C) the composer/songwriter
   D) the performer(s)
   E) the language of the lyrics
   F) importance to my family
   G) other (briefly explain) ______________________________
2) title: _________________________________________________
by: _________________________________________________
performed by: _______________________________________

*why this signifies my Welshness—choose the most important reason(s)*:

A) evokes personal memories
B) what the lyrics are about
C) the composer/songwriter
D) the performer(s)
E) the language of the lyrics
F) importance to my family
G) other (briefly explain) ____________________________________

3) title: _________________________________________________
by: _________________________________________________
performed by: _______________________________________

*why this signifies my Welshness—choose the most important reason(s)*:

A) evokes personal memories
B) what the lyrics are about
C) the composer/songwriter
D) the performer(s)
E) the language of the lyrics
F) importance to my family
G) other (briefly explain) ____________________________________

You may add more songs here if you like (use the reasons from above):

________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________

Diolch! I really appreciate your help with this project!

***Optional:  Yes!  Please add my name to the “thank you for participating” list of names when this is published (your answers will still remain anonymous!)

(print name: ___________________________________________ )
SURVEY

General information:
Age: Current choir:
Gender: Where were you born?
Please list any song(s) that your group sings that makes your choir unique:

I describe myself as (Welsh, British, American, Welsh-American, etc.):

Do you speak Welsh? If so, please choose one of the following:

- I learned it as my first language
- I learned English first and started learning Welsh at age:

My singing experience was mostly in (chapel? school? competitions? etc. choose as many as you need):

Music:
The rest of this will take just a couple more minutes. Below, please list songs that best signify “Welshness” to you, personally. Put them in order starting with the one that best represents your own Welsh identity (there is space on page 2 for your second and third choices). Then, circle the reason(s) why you chose what you did: (Choose as many or as few songs as you want and fill in as many details as you can. Your choices can be from any type of music: well-known or little-known, traditional, pop, with words, without words, etc.)

1) title:
   by:
   performed by:
   why this signifies my Welshness—choose the most important reason(s):
   
   A) evokes personal memories
   B) what the lyrics are about
   C) the composer/songwriter
   D) the performer(s)
   E) the language of the lyrics
   F) importance to my family
   G) other (briefly explain)
2) title: 
by: 
performed by: 
why this signifies my Welshness—choose the most important reason(s):

A) evokes personal memories
B) what the lyrics are about
C) the composer/songwriter
D) the performer(s)
E) the language of the lyrics
F) importance to my family
G) other (briefly explain)

3) title: 
by: 
performed by: 
why this signifies my Welshness—choose the most important reason(s):

A) evokes personal memories
B) what the lyrics are about
C) the composer/songwriter
D) the performer(s)
E) the language of the lyrics
F) importance to my family
G) other (briefly explain)

You may add more songs here if you like (use the reasons from above):

Diolch! I really appreciate your help with this project!

***Optional: Yes! Please add my name to the “thank you for participating” list of names when this is published (your answers will still remain anonymous!):

(print your name: )
APPENDIX C:
Running Statistical Tests on the Data
In order to use statistical analysis in a program like SPSS, the variables must be coded; in other words, each variable is given a number (see below). With numbers, the program can run statistical formulas on the data and show how the variables relate to one another. The surveys were tallied using the following coding system for each singer and his/her #1 song choice:

Sex:  
1 = male  
2 = female

Age:  
1 = 60+  
2 = 40s/50s  
3 = 20s/30s  
4 = under 20

Song Type (analyzed only for songs listed two or more times overall):  
1 = Nationalist (Language and/or Geography references in lyrics)  
2 = Religious  
3 = Both Nationalist and Religious  
4 = Love Song  
5 = Not Determined—appeared only once in the data

Reasons\(^1\) (1 was used if they chose the reason, 0 if they did not):  
A, evokes personal memories  
B, what the lyrics are about  
C, the composer/songwriter  
D, the performer(s)  
E, the language of the lyrics  
F, importance to my family

Birthplace:  
1 = Wales  
2 = England  
3 = not Britain

Language:  
1 = Native Welsh  
2 = Welsh Leaner  
3 = no Welsh

To demonstrate how this works, consider the responses of one randomly-chosen participant (a member of the Penrhyn Male Voice Choir, he appears in the data as P7—the seventh member of Penrhyn surveyed). He picked the song “Myfanwy” (which falls

\(^1\) The reason “G, other (briefly explain)” was not used, since statistical tests cannot be run on subjective answers such as these.
under the category of “Love Song,” based on lyrical content)² and added the performer
“Us.” He chose reason “E—the language of the lyrics.” He is 70 years old, male, born in
Wales, and a native Welsh speaker. Using the coding chart above, his data—translated
into numbers—looks like this:

Singer: P7
Age: 1
Sex: 1
Song Type: 4
Reason(s): A-0, B-0, C-0, D-0, E-1, F-0, G-0
Birthplace: 1
Language: 1

² “Myfanwy” was analyzed for lyrical content because it appeared at least twice in the surveys. It
was actually the most-chosen example overall, with eighteen occurrences.